

Title: Harry Potter: Lily's Child

Rating: R (just to be safe for some violence and mild profanity, but will mostly be PG-13)

Category: A/U, Action/Adventure, Drama

Summary: What if Lily had survived and escaped with Harry in the attack on Halloween of 1981? How will Lily, who many believed to be the smartest witch of her generation, raise her son and how will he fulfill his destiny? The story will mostly deal with Harry in his 6th and 7th year.

Important Paring: HP/GW (for those that care) for

Version: 1.0 - Original

Version: 1.1 - Added Reg's Brit changes

((A/N: This story came about after an email discussion on writing with moshpit. In that discussion, I postulated that almost all of the good plot ideas/domains in the HP fan-fiction universe were already taken at this late date. In response, he gave me an idea and basically challenged me to consider it. I was intrigued enough to take it and run with it. Of course, with the amount of HP fan-fiction in existence, I'm sure there are stories with a similar premise; in fact, I think there is now one on SIYE, but I did not notice it until a couple of months after I started on the notes for this, and I have purposefully not read it. (Yes, I've been working on developing this story for a long time.)

In addition to the original idea, moshpit was kind enough to be an idea and plot consultant, as well as to encourage me to formally write universe notes, which of course forces you to think things through quite a bit more than I normally would have. Ignoring spells, plot ideas, and my outline, my notes on reverse engineering the HP-universe are nearly 90 pages of dense writing (few blank lines).

The resulting story should have a consistent environment and consistent characters. This also means the story will be A/U, potentially very A/U in places (although no aliens or alternate dimensions :-) as I try to "fix" a few things from canon. As I mentioned to moshpit, who agreed with me, woe unto authors who write complex stories for the younger crowd and then have them analyzed by adults. It gives the author plenty of chances to exclaim, "Hmm, I didn't think that through there, did I?" (Please don't think I don't appreciate JKR and all of her hard work, because I do appreciate her work and

imagination. I just think she made some goofs with inconsistencies that her editors also missed.) Hopefully, my inconsistencies will be smaller and fewer. :-) Also, for the "canon police", this story will be based mostly on the facts from books 1-6, with the rare fact from book 7. Overall, stuff from book 7 will be ignored (for consistency reasons).

This story will also be different from my normal ones in that I have not written it all up front. Normally, I write the entire "alpha" version of the story, then upload it as it goes through the "beta" process, which makes it appear that I write very fast. As I tend to write stories that are 150K words or less, and are only of simple to medium complexity, that works just fine. This story will be longer and more complex; therefore, it is only outlined at this time and I'll be uploading it as I write it. That means slower updates than I normally do. Sorry, but that's reality. I'd like updates to come every three weeks, but I suspect they will be every three to six weeks. I now understand why some of those "big" stories I like so much update so slowly. :-)

What can you expect in this story? Like most of my stories, this will be a "more grown-up Harry" who has a clue about life. Unfortunately for him, that also means that Voldemort will also be a little smarter to match. There will be action and adventure, as that is what the HP series is about, but there will also be mystery and intrigue too. Because Harry is a teenager, he will also deal with teenage issues (e.g. thinking he already knows how life works, adults who tell him what to do, making friends, and girls), and have to figure out how to grow up in a world that is torn by war while being thrust into the center of it. Also, most chapters will be about this size, or at least that is my goal.

Last but definitely not least, a HUGE thanks to moshpit for the initial idea and consulting as a pre-beta, not to mention making me think more about what makes a story better and pushing me as an author. Also to my main beta JonathanAvery, who is teaching me more about writing. He also makes me look like a better writer than I really am. Reg will be making me sound more British than I am. Sovran is helping as a post-beta. I must also mention SquidTamer, who is acting as special consultant in a specific area, as well as helping me to learn about a very interesting culture (you'll know where when you

finish this chapter). These guys are my wonderful beta team, and without them, you would not enjoy this story nearly as much. They all deserve a big thanks!

A few notes about writing in this story:

- I will follow the Strunk & White's rule 1: so this means that James's, Sirius's, Albus's are all correct.
- I'm going to leave the period off of many common title abbreviations: Mr, Mrs, Sr, Jr, ...
- Those who know me know that I'm not into (melodramatic) angst. I will have some very mild angst in this story, although if I do my job right, you'll only notice it if you're looking for it.

For those who have been wondering about my “epic” sized story, this is it. The alternate title for the story was “Driven”, but “Lily’s Child” won by a whisker. I think of this chapter as the Prologue, or chapter zero; alas, most places force you to start with chapter “one”. I hope everyone enjoys this story. -- kb.))

Harry Potter: Lily’s Child

Chapter 1: The End of War?

“...abbas amor.” James Potter said, completing the ritual. A faint white glow consumed the smear of his blood on his son’s forehead. After a few seconds, the glow faded from view. “There,” he told his wife, “now I’ve renewed the charm for me, too. Are you sure about this?”

“As sure as I can be without testing it.” Lily Potter had performed the same ritual just before her husband. “We’ll need to do this every thirty days for maximum protection. Then, if something should happen to either one of us...” She had trouble thinking about that, much less saying it.

“We can only hope the war ends soon and that never happens.” James wrapped his wife in his arms and held her as they both looked down on little Harry, their fifteen-month-old son. “I don’t think we can be much safer than where we are; after all, only the Marauders, Albus,

and Hagrid know where we live. As long as we're careful, we'll be all right."

"But, what about our safe house?" she countered, turning to face her husband. "We could go there. No one knows about it, not even Sirius."

James chuckled. "But if we go there, then we won't have a safe house to run to in case of trouble. You said it yourself, Lily, we need layers of defence. Take heart, my love, we'll be safe and we have all of your brilliant plans in case of trouble. Now, let's try one of my plans," he said with a smirk. "Why don't you go take Harry to bed, and I'll go turn on the wireless and pour a couple of glasses of wine. We can relax and enjoy the evening. Maybe we can even see about giving Harry a little sister."

"James!" Lily exclaimed with some exasperation. She swatted him on the arm before she leaned down and picked up Harry, who was struggling to his feet on the table. "You're so, so, incorrigible."

Laughing, James headed towards the kitchen while Lily carried Harry upstairs to his bedroom. She climbed the stairs and tucked him into his crib. His room was smaller and much more crowded than the old nursery, as it had been difficult to decide what to leave behind.

Not that Lily would complain about her new home. Perhaps it was not quite as nice as the house they had sold a few months ago, but it had an endearing quaint charm that she loved. Still, the house in Godric's Hollow could be a shack for all Lily cared as long as it protected them from Lord Voldemort. Although only a few of their friends knew about this home, the charms that she and Albus Dumbledore, the headmaster of Hogwarts, had wrapped about it were the true protection.

A few weeks ago, she and James had placed the rented house under the Fidelius Charm. The charm hid a secret within a single person, and only the Secret Keeper could reveal their location. That secret was known to a small and select group, which included the other three Marauders, who were their closest friends from school, Albus Dumbledore, and Hagrid, a close confidant. They had almost not told

Hagrid, but Albus had recommended the large Keeper of the Keys and Grounds of Hogwarts as his duties gave him an anonymous freedom so that he could bring them supplies and news of the war.

Unfortunately, it left them almost completely isolated, but their son's life was more important than anything else. So, they remained within the small house and spent most of their time raising Harry and doing research for the Order of the Phoenix, a group of witches and wizards sworn to the defeat of Lord Voldemort.

Closing the nursery door, she headed back towards the stairs, where she could hear soft music playing below. They could have had a nicer house, perhaps even casting the Fidelius Charm on their old house, but the sale of their previous home had given them more options. Where Harry was concerned, Lily and James were more than a bit paranoid. They loved each other greatly, but both she and her husband had decided that for the duration of the war, Harry came first, no matter how painful that might be.

While all of their friends assumed that the extra money from the house sale was put into the bank for them to live off of, she and James had secretly bought another small house in a country far away from merry old England. They had used Muggle means to buy it and had told no one about it, leaving it almost impossible to find, for most wizards and witches were very unfamiliar with Muggle record-keeping systems. Even those familiar with Muggle records should have no hope of finding it as it had been purchased under a different name. It was their final level of protection, and she hoped it would never have to be used.

She descended the stairs, and her husband greeted her with two glasses of wine as she entered the living room. She took one look at the wine and then rolled her eyes at her husband. "Why, pray tell, do we have orange wine?"

"To celebrate Halloween, Love" he told her with a twinkle in his eye, as if the joke should have been obvious. "A toast... To All Hallows Eve, may the forces of Light prevail." They clinked their glasses before they both took a drink. James sighed, it was his favourite red wine, a decent Burgundy, despite its presently charmed colour.

Lily sank onto the couch, and her husband of almost two and a half years joined her. She watched him take her glass from her and set both glasses down on the low table in front of them. "Besides your tease, what are you up to, James Potter?"

"What? Me? Up to something, Lily? I'm hurt..." he placed a gentle kiss on her cheek, "that you would imply ..." and then on her jaw, "that I would ever be ..." her head titled as he descended to her throat, "up to something."

Though she was enjoying every second of his ministrations, Lily rolled her eyes. She knew "her marauder" far too well. After all, it was how she had found herself pregnant a little over six months after they were married. As he continued to kiss her, she stiffened as an icy chill went up her spine. She turned to face the front door.

James pulled back and glanced at his wife. "What? Did you hear something?" he asked with a concerned voice.

"Check out front while I check the back. I'd swear I just felt an Anti-Disapparation ward go up." Lily had the rare gift of being able to sense active wards.

James didn't hesitate. When it came to their security, he and Lily stopped at nothing. He bounded across the room to the front window and moved the curtain slightly. Lily was almost to the kitchen when he exclaimed, "Oh, shit!"

Lily stopped and looked at James, afraid to ask the question that was on her mind. There was no need to ask, the fear in James's eyes answered her. Voldemort had come for them.

"Wormtail's betrayed us!" James said as he spun and drew his wand. "Run, Lily! Get Harry and go! I'll hold 'em up to give you time."

Lily turned and bolted for the stairs and their sleeping son. She was at the stairs in four large steps when an explosion rocked the house. Looking over her shoulder, she saw the front door go flying by, blown inward off its hinges. Although shocked, she pushed onward, taking

the stairs two at a time. She prayed that if she escaped fast enough that James would still be able to join her.

At the top of the stairs, she flicked her wand and charmed the stairs to turn into an almost frictionless slide when anyone was half-way up them.

"No, I don't care what you offer!" James shouted from the living room. "I will not leave my family to your so-called mercies!" Praying for his safety, she ran toward the nursery.

She cast a quick summoning spell as she entered the nursery. An emergency survival trunk zipped through the air and into Harry's room. A quick shrinking charm made it easy to catch, and she threw it into Harry's nappy bag as she slung it over her shoulder. Scooping up a deeply asleep Harry wrapped in his baby blanket, she summoned a very special teddy bear off of his changing table.

Lily touched her wand to the teddy bear and said, "Activate." Nothing happened. She tried again and then swore.

Muffled sounds of the fight downstairs echoed in the room and the floor shook from the occasional spell. She wished she could hear what was happening, but having survived three encounters with the monster already, Lily knew both he and her husband would be using non-verbal spells, as that made it harder on your opponent. Another blast shook the house.

Shaking all that from her head, she concentrated on her task. As soon as she left, the wards around the house should make a sound, and that would be the signal to James that he could leave, too. Until then, she knew he would literally do anything to give her time to get away with Harry. However, she had to get free first. Voldemort must have cast an Anti-Portkey ward as well; she hoped she did not have to take the time to break it.

For her first escape attempt, Lily fired a blasting hex at the window, hoping she could fly away. The glass glowed brightly for a moment as the energy dissipated, but it did not break. "Oh, bloody hell! I'm going to have to do this the hard way."

Running through her memories, she started trying every spell she could think of to break the Anti-Portkey ward. The problem was which variant of the ward prevented her exit. Dozens existed, and they had not planned for Anti-Portkey wards in any of their scenarios. She mentally cursed her short-sightedness as she cast another spell.

After the fifth failure, she heard James scream and then silence. A high pitched cold laughter echoed through the house, and Lily could only assume the worst -- her husband was dead. Her throat constricted and her eyes burned, but she held tight to her son. He needed her. With a desperate wave of her wand, she banished the door closed and then sealed it with the strongest charm she could remember. It was a vain hope that it would buy her more than a few extra seconds, but a few seconds could save her life.

She went back to work with a vengeance. None of the spells were working, but there were dozens of spells to choose from. As she made another attempt, she heard a loud noise on the stairs. "Damn! He's overcoming the security on the stairs!" she swore.

Trying to go faster, Lily continued to cast more and more charms to overcome the Anti-Portkey ward, trying to find the one flaw she needed to crack it. As she finished the fourth attempt of this new series, the door to Harry's room blew in and barely missed her. Spinning around, she clutched Harry tightly to her bosom. Voldemort stood in the doorway with a vicious smile on his face. Power radiated off of him.

"As I told your husband, you don't have to die, you know," he calmly said. "I only want to fulfill the prophecy. Just give me the boy and you can live."

"No!" She would sacrifice herself before she let this monster have her son.

"Foolish Mudblood woman! It is not like you could stop me if your pathetic husband could not." He gave an indulgent smile and raised

his wand with a careless ease. "Avada Kedavra!" A sickly green beam shot from his wand.

Lily watched Voldemort's wand and slipped beneath the spell as she dived to the side. It was hard with a bag over one shoulder and a baby on the opposite hip. In desperation, she tried the only other way she could think of to quickly take down his wards. It had a major side-effect, but she was not going to be around to worry about it. She knew she only had a second or so before Voldemort would be able to cast the Killing Curse again.

She felt a surge go out of her as she cried out, "Signum pungo!"

"Avada ..."

The area now felt different to her, so Lily touched her wand to the teddy bear for one last try, praying that it would now work. "Activate!" she screamed, her voice filled with terror.

"... Kedavra!"

Relief flooded through her as the Portkey activated and she felt the familiar pull behind her navel. As the Portkey whisked her and Harry away, she saw the wand pointed at her body and a green light of the Killing Curse rushing at her. She twisted, hoping to protect Harry, but the diaper bag hindered her.

Gleefully, Voldemort saw the deadly curse hit the baby in the forehead just as the little boy and his mother left. However, his joy was short lived. In horror, he watched the curse rebound back towards him. It was so fast and he was caught so off guard, he never even tried to move out of the way.

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Peter Pettigrew stared at the bloody corpse of his one-time close friend. "James, I'm s-s-so s-sorry," he said for the third time since his master had gone upstairs. "You have to understand, I-I didn't have a choice. You d-do remember wh-what you said to me back in school, don't you? And Padfoot, too? Y-you really shouldn't have done that.

And when the Master asked, I had to tell him. Don't worry though, it's really for the best." He quietly giggled to himself and continued to look at his former friend, ignoring the fire that was now consuming the couch and the area rug from a Fireball spell which had hit them. "I'm s-s-so s-sorry..."

The sound of a gong reverberated through the house, and then a loud thump came from upstairs. With a smile on his face, Wormtail struggled to use the handrail to pull himself up the collapsed stairs. When he got to the landing, he found one door destroyed. Looking in caused him to be first confused, and then horrified. There was no-one standing and only one dead body on the floor -- his master. There was no evidence that he could see of Lily or Harry being there. There was only his dead master, with all the spell damage up there, too, and his master's wand on the floor.

At a loss to explain these strange observations and in the hope that he might gain some of his master's power, Wormtail picked up the Yew and Phoenix Feather wand and Apparated back to his master's hideout to think about what he should do next. Perhaps he should hide somewhere for a while...

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The Portkey deposited Lily on the other side of the little village as there was no reason for anyone to suspect she would come here. She stumbled under the weight of the diaper bag and her screaming son, but she regained her balance before she could fall. The four-time survivor of Voldemort's wrath immediately started running. Twenty feet later, she was behind a large bush. Holding Harry tightly as he cried, she concentrated and Apparated straight into Sirius's flat.

Landing, she glanced about. The flat was dark, and no one was home. She could not decide if she was angry or glad that Sirius was out. Both Apparation and Portkeys could be followed if someone did not wait too long to do the destination revealing spell, so she had to hurry through more evasive manoeuvres. For stealth, she cast a sleeping charm on the screaming boy in her arms as she hurriedly walked to the fireplace. That was when she first noticed the bloody spot on his forehead. Still, he had been crying, so it should not be too bad, she

hoped. As much as she wished to treat her son, the wound would have to wait for a few minutes.

She grabbed a small handful of Floo Powder and tossed half of it into the fireplace. "The Ministry of Magic," she said in a commanding voice, and she stepped into the green-tinted flames.

The right spell could force a Floo to reveal the last destination on it too, but that spell took longer, which would be a nice buffer for her. Plus, her pursuer would have to guess if she Apparated, took another Portkey, or used a Floo. However, even if someone followed her, the Ministry of Magic had the largest collection of Flooes anywhere on the British Isles. It would be easy to lose any pursuer there.

She came out of the fireplace in the middle of the atrium wall. Because it was late, the night guard was thoroughly engrossed in a magazine behind his desk at the other end of the hall, oblivious of her arrival. After all, it was late enough that he probably had not seen anyone else for hours. Lily turned away from the guard to hide her face, quietly walked over two fireplaces, and threw in the rest of the Floo Powder in her hand. "The Prancing Pony," she whispered. It was a small, out-of-the-way Wizard pub in the Western Isles that the Potters, and no one else they had ever asked, frequented. She and James had picked this place purposefully before they went into hiding.

As she came out of that fireplace, she instantly Apparated to an alcove at an underground station, not far from where her family had lived when she was young. Seeing a tube train come into the station on the other side of the tracks, she quickly Apparated to the other platform, the secrecy about hiding magic from Muggles be damned -- this was life and death. Coming out from behind a large sign, which masked some building work, she ran for the door of the train, reaching it as the doors opened. Hurrying in, she walked to the end of the carriage and sat. The only other passengers were at the other end and paid her no attention after a glance to see that she was not a threat.

Now that she had a minute, she took a deep breath ... and almost lost it. No, she could not grieve now. She had to stay strong for Harry

and herself until she reached somewhere safe. But, now that she had a few moments, she had something else to do.

Reaching into the baby bag, she pulled out the shrunken survival trunk, which was about the size of a half a loaf of bread. It contained all of her and James's personal journals, irreplaceable books, several changes of clothes, a few meals in cans, and various other items needed for survival, or things that should not be lost. Opening it, she used her fingernails to carefully pull out a very small sparkly square, before she closed the trunk back and put it away. Careful to shield what she was doing from the other passengers, she whispered the enlarging spell as she waved her wand over the small object. Seconds later, she was holding a hand mirror.

"Sirius Black," she whispered into the mirror. While she waited, she tried to think about time. How long had it been since she had used that awful spell to break and collapse every ward she had put on the house and then leave? She was not certain, but it had to have been less than two of the most terrifying minutes of her life. As the caster of the Fidelius charm and the other wards, she had overloaded all of her wards, which had caused a cascading failure taking down all of Voldemort's wards with hers. To anyone who checked the home, it would appear as if there had never been wards, or else she had died. "Sirius Black," she whispered again to hurry him up.

While she waited, she turned her attention to Harry. A film of blood covered his forehead. Lily dabbed at it with the blanket and found a small shallow cut above his eye. The wound was bleeding a lot, but it did not look life threatening. Still, she covered it up with the corner of his blanket and applied light pressure to minimize the bleeding. For a long half minute, the train rumbled down the tracks, and Lily took stock. Finally, the mirror swirled to life and Sirius's voice called out, "James?"

"Ssh, are you alone?" she quietly asked. She hoped the other passengers would think she was talking to her baby on her lap and not the mirror in front of the baby.

"Lily?" he answered also in a soft voice. "I'm at a party, but I stepped into a room when the mirror vibrated. What's wrong? You're not supposed to call on this normally."

"Sirius, we've been betrayed. That bastard Wormtail brought You-Know-Who to our house."

"WHAT?!"

Lily had to cough to try to cover Sirius's shout. "Ssh, other people can hear."

"Where are you?" he asked, his voice an intense hiss. "And are James and Harry with you? Are you all safe?" There was no mistaking the urgency and worry in his voice.

"Sirius," she paused and thought, oh god this is hard. "Harry and I are alive." She glanced at the corner of his blanket that was starting to show a small bloody spot, but other than that cut her son seemed fine. "But I don't know about James. Will you please go over to the house and see about James? But be careful, they might still be there! I -- I don't know who to trust anymore besides you..."

"I'm leaving right now," Sirius said with determination in his voice and a grim face. "I'll call you shortly." The image in the mirror wavered, and Sirius's face was replaced with her own distraught face. She placed the mirror back into her bag, not wanting to see the loss in her own eyes.

A moment later, the train arrived at Piccadilly Circus, a busy place which suited her just fine. Getting off the train, she hid amidst the other passengers, but managed to hover near the back of the Halloween crowd. When she thought no one was looking her way, she Apparated to a little clearing in the Forbidden Forest, about a half-mile from Hagrid's cottage and outside of the school wards.

She knelt down and lit her wand. Once more she pulled out her survival trunk, opened it, retrieved a little stick, and then returned the trunk to her bag. Dousing her light, she tapped her wand to the stick, which grew into a full-sized old Comet Quidditch broom. She lacked

James's passion for flying, but she flew well enough. Balancing the bag and Harry, she mounted the broom, Disillusioned everything, and pushed off. With infinite caution, she guided her broom toward the large castle rising above the canopy of the forest.

Taking care to hide from the Headmaster's tower windows, she skirted the castle battlements until she found a dark window tucked underneath the room in the north tower that housed the new Divination Teacher. She unlocked and opened the window so she could fly in. She lit the torches on the walls as she entered the room. The sputtering light revealed an unused classroom with no portraits, exactly what she wanted. With a quick wave of her wand, she cancelled her Disillusionment charms and set to work on securing the room.

First the door. Although a locking charm might suffice, having no door was better. Unfortunately, transfiguration was not her specialty, and so the glacial-paced transformation of wood to stone required all of her skill and concentration. Once complete, the now solid wall bore no evidence that a door had ever existed. Satisfied that she would be safe for at least a few hours, she conjured a bed with all the linens and laid Harry down on it. While conjured items eventually disappeared, she had enough magical power to make something of this size last for the night.

At the thought that she should be safe for the night, the results of being in a hyper-state for the last fifteen minutes or so caught up with her. Lily almost collapsed as the shakes from her adrenalin rush left her. She sagged down to the bed and leaned on it for a few minutes, taking slow deep breaths to recover. Knowing she must go on for a little while longer, she focused on her son's face as she recovered.

When her hands were mostly steady again, she tenderly peeled the blood encrusted blanket back and found the cut on her child's forehead, which still had not scabbed. Cleaning it revealed a thin cut in the shape of a lightening bolt with one jag in it over his right eye. Trying as hard as she could, she could not get it to heal like a normal cut would.

Perplexed, she ran through the night's events. The splinters of the nursery door had not come anywhere near her, and collapsing wards would not have cut anyone. Voldemort had only cast the Killing Curse... Lily gasped. It was not possible. No one had ever survived the Killing Curse, but it would explain the cut. Somehow her baby had miraculously survived. However, that meant that the protection charm James had done earlier that evening had worked. It had worked because he had sacrificed himself for Harry. A wave of grief swelled over her, and Lily had to struggle for a moment not to drown in the emotion.

She turned to her son and began to examine the wound more closely, but the mirror buzzed. She pulled it out of the baby bag. "Yes?"

"Lily, it's me. Oh god, Lily, I'm sorry. I got there just as Hagrid came out of the house with James's body." He had not known how to soften that blow, so he had not even tried.

Fortunately for him, Lily had been expecting that answer, though that did not make it any less painful. The woman hung her head as tears started streaking down her face. "I was afraid of that. James wouldn't have given up for anything, so when Voldemort came up the stairs, I knew it had to be true." She continued to try to force her tears not to flow, but they came anyway.

"You fought him again?"

"I dodged and got lucky," she clarified after a sniffle. "Listen, have you told anyone I'm alive?" A plan was forming in her mind. It was a variation of one she and James had come up with.

"No. I'm trying to find Moony so we can start hunting for the effing rat. He's not at his house."

This just might work, Lily thought. "All right, don't tell anyone I'm alive. Act like Harry and I are dead."

"Not even Moony?" Sirius asked incredulously.

"No, well, not unless you absolutely have to. The fewer people who know, the fewer there are that can spill the secret. Besides finding Wormtail, I have one assignment for you. Get James's wand, wedding ring, and his Invisibility Cloak. Albus will have the Cloak. Wrap those up and owl them to me before morning."

"I can do that, though Albus may want to know why when all three of you are supposed to be dead," Sirius pointed out, his face constantly changing as his emotions warred within him.

"Try not to, but you can tell Albus if you really must. No, wait, if you have to tell him, demand an Unbreakable Oath to keep it a secret from everyone, no exceptions. I want those things, especially the Cloak, and then Harry and I are going to disappear for a while until it's safe to come out."

The anguish on Sirius's face told Lily that he did not like hearing that.  
"Where are you going, Lily?"

"James and I have one more safe house. The less you know the better. I'll call you on the mirror on all of our birthdays at midnight. That's three times a year. Do not try to call me, I won't answer."

His eyes narrowed in dislike. "Are you sure, Lily? Perhaps there's some way I can help you... Or Harry. He is my godson..."

"I'm sorry Sirius, but I'm sure." Lily took a deep breath to keep the tears at bay. "Owl me that stuff."

He hung his head. "Are you at least safe for tonight?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"Safe enough. Don't worry, I don't expect anyone to find us tonight, but I can't stay here past morning. Just owl me the things I asked for, and I'll call you in a couple of weeks on your birthday." Lily did not have to ask for Wormtail's head. She knew Sirius would do that anyway.

Sirius looked like he wanted to argue, but Lily's tone stopped him.  
"Fine. I'll get the stuff you asked for and owl it to you. I better go now

so I can find Moony, and we can go hunting. I'll keep the mirror on me, and I want you to call if you need anything, anytime, anywhere. Do you understand?"

Lily gave him a tired and forced smile. "Thanks, Sirius, I owe you. Keep Moony with you, don't split up. Good-night and godspeed, Sirius." She turned the mirror off and laid it down. A soft sob escaped. Sniffling, she wiped away the tears with the sleeve of her robe and turned back to her son. She had to finish with him before she could rest.

Casting various diagnostic spells on the new wound, she became perplexed. This was certainly not a normal wound. Worse, there seemed to be a bit of magic stuck there. Several spells later, she had isolated that extra magic so that Harry was protected from it, then she cast a magic draining charm on it. To her surprise and horror, the scar came alive and writhed for a couple of seconds before it went still.

Checking the wound again, she found nothing, not even her protective spell. Checking Harry, she found his magical core, but she swore it was stronger now than when she had checked on his birthday three months ago. In fact, it was significantly stronger. Something must have happened tonight, but she was unsure of exactly what. Still, at least she had removed whatever that residual magic had been in him. There was no telling what that would have done over time.

Now that Harry seemed to be a normal, healthy baby again, Lily cast another healing charm on the wound, and it closed up, leaving the faintest of lines that would all but disappear over time. As she changed his diaper, she considered what had happened to Harry tonight, and that it was a blessing for the scar to be that small, let alone for her child to have survived at all. Finally, she cleaned the blood off of his blanket with a cleaning spell and laid him in bed. He looked so innocent, wonderful, and cute, just like a child should. She smiled as only a mother could at her son as she kicked off her shoes and crawled into bed with him.

With a wave of her wand, all the lights in the room went off and she pulled the blanket over her and her son. Holding him tightly, as if to prevent him from being pulled away, Lily finally gave into the deep sorrow she had been holding back. The young widow, who was barely twenty-one, quietly sobbed herself to sleep over the next hour.

An insistent hooting woke Lily Potter. She looked at the window. A big brown owl was hovering near the window ledge. She went over and took the package from the bird and let it fly off. Opening the plain bag, she found her three requested items. "Thank you, Sirius," she said.

Returning to the bed, she watched Harry wriggle around and gurgle as he woke up. Looking at her watch, she saw it was nearly seven in the morning. She needed to get a move on if she was to leave without anyone seeing her.

As quick as she could, she changed Harry's nappy. Standing him on the floor and letting him hold onto her leg, she vanished the conjured bed. Then she turned to face the blank stone wall that had held a door, and she concentrated on the transfiguration and slowly brought the door back.

Satisfied, she picked up Harry, his bag, and her broom. With James's wand and ring in her pocket, and his Cloak around her and Harry, she flew out the window and closed it back. With care to hold onto Harry, she took her time reaching the forest. Harry giggled and chortled, enjoying the flying. She used to hate it when James or Sirius would take Harry flying, but now she appreciated them as those flights were working in her favour as her son enjoyed the sensation.

Nearly five minutes later, Lily landed in the same clearing she had used the previous night. While she juggled everything she was holding, she pulled out her wand and touched it to her wedding ring. "Secret Home." As the pull took a hold of her, she considered that what she was doing was illegal, as it was an unregistered international Portkey. But, since the Ministry had failed to rein in the Dark wizard who had killed her husband, she felt they had no right to hold this Portkey against her.

After a much longer than normal transit, Lily landed hard on her feet and then overbalanced and fell over from all the things she was holding in her arms, including a frightened baby boy. "Mumma?"

"There, there, it's all right," Lily said, patting her son's head. "Be a good boy just a little bit longer, Harry. I know we're home, but we need to leave, do a few things, and then arrive the right way." They had arrived in a plain little house that she and James had seen during their visit to Japan nearly three months ago, when the war had turned very personal.

They had loved the quaint place when they had visited disguised as Japanese Muggles. The people in the small village had been wary of them at first, but when it came out that Lily had studied medicine, there had been a little cautious acceptance -- although grudging tolerance might have been a better description. So they had bought the small house and hired an older widower neighbour to take care of the gardens until they could move in after James had finished his merchant-sailor job sometime in the future. It had been a good plan. A young nurse and her sailor husband without any extended family. It still was a good plan, just without her husband now.

Coming back to the present, Lily sat Harry down for a moment and then pulled her survival trunk out and expanded it. Lily pulled out clean Muggle clothes for herself and changed. She also changed Harry and made a bottle for him while she had a breakfast from her survival supplies. Then, using her mirror to check her results, she placed several glamours on herself and a couple on Harry to help them blend in with the locals better. She also cast a language translation spell on herself, pulled an amount of Yen from the trunk, and put the notes in her pocket. Finally she put everything else but Harry into the trunk and closed it. Scooping up Harry, who had happily toddled away to check out the house, she grabbed the trunk and Apparated to the common Apparation site in the country's capital.

Dragging the lightened trunk behind her, she walked to a nearby Wizarding hotel where she rented a room for the next month. After going up to their room, she transfigured an extra chair into a crib and placed little Harry in it. She bent down and kissed her son's ear and whispered, "Welcome to Japan, Harry. We'll be back to our new

home in Heiwateki in a month or two. Mummy just has to do a little work to pick up a nursing certificate."

Lily unpacked their meagre belongings as she considered the hurdles still in front of her. On their previous trip, when they had purchased the house, they had also purchased identities in Japan. To the Muggle government, she was the daughter of an American sailor and a Japanese woman from Osaka. She and her Japanese husband had met through family friends. Her husband was, or had been, a merchant sailor for a Japanese company. Lily had all the legal documents required to live here and show a history of living and working in Japan, although that had cost them both a pretty Knut. Even with all that, she still had some fear at not fitting into a culture that strongly preferred conformance, adhering to tradition and family. The problem would be even worse as a woman with no family, sort of like a house-elf in a Pureblood household. But they had picked this country because it was so different and so far from England. Voldemort would never think to look here. If only they had come here first.

However, there was no time to dwell on impossible wishes. After she was unpacked and settled in, she took Harry and left the hotel. She made her way through the Japanese version of Diagon Alley to get a better idea of how everything was organized in her new homeland. After an hour, she stopped at a small place that did not look too busy and bought some food. She was hungry, but more importantly, she needed to test out her language skills. Fortunately, the translation spell worked reasonably well. Also, the more she listened to others, the more the spell helped her to pick up the language. She held her sleeping son as she finished the last of her lunch and thought about her new life.

It was going to be hard to adjust to life without James. She wondered how long she would cry herself to sleep at nights. She also was not sure how a young widow with a small child would be treated here, but she would do the best she could to start a new life. That new life was about protecting her son and getting him ready for what must come. "Damn Trelawney!" she thought to herself as she cursed the prophecy that made that duty necessary, but what choice did she have?

She also tried to work out who had told Voldemort the beginning of the prophecy and pointed the monster at her family. The Headmaster had only said a young Death Eater had heard the first part and run away. Not for the first time, she wondered if Albus knew more than he was telling. She also wondered what she was going to do about it.

(19 Nov 1981 - Sirius's birthday)

Lily thought she had everything set up like she wanted. There was a picture of her on the table in front of the magical mirror, and a white sheet obscured the wall behind the picture. No matter how hard Sirius looked, Lily was certain he would not see anything she did not want him to see. She stepped to the side of the mirror, just out of view, and called, "Sirius Black." It was nine in the morning on the 19th of November, approximately two and a half weeks after that fateful night. He should be expecting her call.

A few seconds later, Sirius's voice spoke from the mirror. "Lily? Why am I looking at a picture of you?"

Lily smiled to herself. "Because I'm trying to protect you, Sirius. The less you know about where we are and what we look like now, the better off you are."

"Do you really think I'd betray you, Lily?" He sounded hurt.

She sighed and closed her eyes, trying to hold back her feelings. "I'd like to say no, but to be honest, I don't know who to fully trust anymore. I, ah, I hope you understand."

Sirius sighed in a tired voice. "I do, sadly I do. I thought Wormtail was one of us." He paused and blew out a deep breath. "I guess I should start with an apology, for what little good it will do. I am so very sorry I suggested the switch, Lily. If I hadn't done that..." His voice cracked.

"Sirius, please stop it!" Lily was failing to hold her emotions in check as the tears started welling in her eyes. This conversation was harder than she had expected. "It's not your fault. James and I agreed with

your suggestion. We could have said no to you like we had to Albus's offer to be the Secret Keeper."

"I wish you had. Oh god, I wish you had just told me to shut up."

"Me, too, but it's too late now." She paused and drew a big breath, trying to clear the tightness in her chest. "Sirius? Can I ask a big favour of you?"

"Anything, Lily, anything. I'd hide any secret you want and give you an Unbreakable Vow if I could."

Maybe this would not be so hard, she thought. "Will you give me a Wizard's Oath that you'll help me and keep everything secret?"

"Of course, Lily." He cleared his throat and made a few noises trying to sound normal. "Ego fides. I, Sirius Orion Black, do swear this Wizard's Oath on my magic that I will work in Lily and Harry Potter's best interest and keep their secrets until they release me from this promise. So I swear, Ego fides."

She breathed a sigh of relief when she saw the bright flash on the hanging sheet. "Thank you, Sirius. You don't know how much that means to me."

"Anything for you, Lily," he sounded so guilty. "And just so you know, I haven't told anyone about you or Harry ... not Albus, not even Moony. So tell me, how are you and Harry doing?"

"As well as can be expected. I'm..." she sniffled once, her emotions coming back with a vengeance as she thought about why she was in a new place. "I'm doing my best to fit in and make a new life here. We'll have to wait and see what happens. What's been happening there?"

A little bit of cheer crept back into his voice. "You'll be happy to know that no one other than me knows you're still alive."

"That's good," she said with relief, "that's really good."

"Dumbledore believes that because all of your wards and the Fidelius charm are gone," he explained. "What really happened?"

She blew out her breath, wishing she could tell him, but it was for his own good that he not know all the details. "Sirius, like James and I told you before, we can't tell you the full reason, but I'll tell you now that Albus came to us a few months ago and said that he had heard that Voldemort would be after us and the Longbottoms more than anyone else."

"Alice and Frank are still fine and in hiding," Sirius interjected.

"That's good to hear. Anyway, what we didn't tell you was that in mid-October, he came and told us that a spy had informed him that Voldemort was coming for us soon. That's why..." she started to lose it again and had to pause for a deep breath, "...why we put up the Fidelius charm and other wards to protect ourselves." She hated the fact that all the work had been for nothing because of one stupid rat.

"Do you know who the spy in Voldemort's group was?" Sirius asked.

"No, but I don't think it was Wormtail. Albus implied it was someone else. That it was someone who had had a change of heart, so probably a young Death Eater."

"I see. Then what happened on Halloween?" he asked hesitantly, as if he was afraid to find out.

Lilly closed her eyes and swallowed hard, knowing that Sirius deserved to know, no matter how much she did not want to relive that night. "We had just put Harry down for the evening, and James and I were enjoying some time to ourselves." She tried to block out the thought of not having any more times with James like that and was having a hard time.

"I felt an Anti-Apparation ward go up. James looked out the front and saw Voldemort and Wormtail." Her tightly controlled anger exploded at the memory of the betrayal. "I couldn't believe that he had betrayed us!"

She took a deep breath before saying the next part in almost a whisper. "But it was true, and we didn't have a plan for that. We had a plan for the wards failing, for one of us being gone, for everything but that." Unfelt tears streaked Lily's face. "At least we had a plan for if Voldemort found us, so we executed that plan. I went for Harry to get away while," she had to pause to sniffle again, "James delayed them to give me time." She had to stop again to sniffle, and Sirius did not interrupt.

"As soon as I left, it was supposed to signal James to let him know we were gone and for him to get away too, but that didn't happen because -- that -- that monster!" she screamed the last word before she paused and pulled her emotions back in order so she could talk. "He put up an Anti-Portkey ward, too. James was," she hesitated and took a few more breaths, "oh god, he was dead before I could break the wards. And then He found us before I could get away and," the words flowed and would not stop, like the tears that now clouded her vision, "I had to dodge one Killing Curse. I was desperate. I did a spell that overloaded all my wards in an attempt to take out the Anti-Portkey ward, too. We left just as he launched another Killing Curse." Her words stopped, but her tears did not.

In the near silence as she sobbed, Sirius commented, "That was close!"

She gave a sad and bitter laugh. "It was closer than you think. I think Harry got hit with the curse." The lie was bitter on her tongue, but she did it to protect her son. "But, because we were already Portkeying away, it didn't kill Harry. He has a small scar that doesn't want to go away no matter how I try to heal it. I think the scar will always be slightly visible." She did not plan to tell Sirius about the protection spell she and James had done. No one else really needed to know about that.

"And then I made my way here," she said in relief. Although she had dreaded telling Sirius, Lily felt somehow better after unburdening her guilt. So many nights she had lain awake wishing for someone who could comfort her or listen. Like draining a wound, telling the story would help her heal a little.

"By the way, thank you for sending my husband's things to me." Not saying his name helped a little.

Sirius snorted. "You won't believe what I had to go through to get them, though."

"Oh?" With Dumbledore, she could believe almost anything. He was quite brilliant, but over time, she had decided that maybe he was not playing with a full potions kit any more. That was why she had not wanted him to be their Secret Keeper.

"Yeah. I had to swear an oath that I was working in your best interest. Before then, I spent most of the night trying to find Moony, so by the time I made arrangements to go hunting with him, the sun was starting to come up. I made my way to Hogwarts shortly after that, only to be greeted by multiple hexes from McGonagall as I walked in the front door. She slammed me into a wall with no regard for my person, I tell you. It hurt like hell, too!"

A smile came over Lily as she listened to the story. It felt good to smile again, even if it was at Sirius's expense.

"Then she took me up to the Headmaster's office and Dumbledore told me he was going to have me arrested for betraying you. I had to do some fast talking and an oath swearing I didn't."

"Look on the bright side, Sirius. The plan to make everyone think you were the Secret Keeper did work." Lily mentally shuddered to think what might have happened if they had not believed Sirius. If they had thrown him in prison, she would have had to come out of hiding to rescue him.

"Thanks, Lily," he said with a slightly sarcastic tone. "Anyway, Hagrid pulled James's body out," Sirius's tone became sadder, "but he couldn't get up the stairs to check there, so that's why I could get the ring and the wand. I found out that Albus only knows that an adult died in your house. Apparently, some of your potions fueled the fire, and it burned so hot the Muggle firemen had trouble putting it out. The fire also burned the body so badly they couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman. I assume that was You-Know-Who's body?"

"Yes," she confirmed -- there was no other logical answer. She knew the Killing Curse had hit Harry, so it must have rebounded back to Voldemort. "And Sirius, you can say his name; he's not going to come get you."

"I know, it's just habit. So they really do think all three of you are dead."

"I'm sorry you had to mislead them, but thanks, Sirius." Lily was thankful, but the memories of that night were starting to get to her again.

"Oh," Sirius went on, not seeing Lily's emotional change for the worse, "Frank and Alice are still safe, or so I'm told as I haven't actually talked to them since they went into hiding. I haven't heard when they plan to come out."

Lily nodded and responded automatically. "If they're smart, they'll wait until the Death Eaters are captured, or that's what I'd do." The memories and the emotions kept pounding at her.

"That could be a long time, Lily."

"Better safe than sorry." Lily said sadly. She wiped her very wet eyes with a handkerchief, something she had used a lot in the last few weeks. Reliving that night left her emotionally drained.

"So you've left to start a new life?" Sirius asked.

"Yeah, pretty much," she said in exhaustion, although her next statement was said with conviction. "Here I am, and I'll do my damnedest to raise Harry well and to prepare him for when He comes back."

"You think he'll really come back again? He's dead." Sirius sounded very surprised. "The body in your house, it was him..." He sounded so hopeful that the war had to be over.

"I know how you feel," Lily told him as part of her thought through the prophecy and how not all of it had been fulfilled. "I also wish he was truly gone, so that," but she had to stop for a moment. Her voice was rough when she continued. "So that James's sacrifice might mean more, but I don't believe it. I -- I can't prove it, but I believe he did something so he's not really dead and he'll return some day." It was a small lie of omission, but it was better for Sirius's sake. She could not explain that she knew because not all of the prophecy had been fulfilled.

"That doesn't make sense." Sirius sounded so confused.

"I'm sure it doesn't, Sirius, but just take my word for it. Call it a woman's hunch if it will make you feel better." She hated these little lies to her friend, but she felt like she had no choice at the moment.

"I really hope you're wrong, Lily, I want you to be wrong," he said with strength for the first time. He sighed a long and deep sigh. "I suppose it'll be ten years before I see you, won't it? I mean -- you know, when Harry has to come back for school?"

Lily shook her head, although she knew her friend could not see her. "No, Sirius. I'm really sorry, but it might be longer." She took another deep breath and tried to focus on a better future rather than the painful past. "We're not coming back until Harry can fully defend himself, or until I have a really good reason and know that Harry will be safe. Until then, Voldemort is the Ministry's responsibility." The thought of what she might be condemning the people of England to was hard to swallow, but her son was more important to her, and if the prophecy was right, he was more important to them, too.

Sirius chuckled, but it sounded forced and somewhat hollow to Lily. "Well, I have some good news for you there. Not only has it been reported that You-Know-Who not been seen since before Halloween, but Death Eater activity has been at an all-time low since you left."

A small smile, only the second since that night, graced her face. "That's good to hear, and I hope it stays that way. Sirius?"

"Yeah?"

"There was one other strange thing that happened that night." Only analytical thought saved her from more despair.

"Oh, what?"

"When I examined Harry's wound, where the curse hit him, it was like there was some sort of foreign magic there," she said. In truth, she was still trying to think up an answer for the mystery.

"And? Don't keep me in suspense, Lily."

"That's the problem, Padfoot, I don't know what it was, and that scares me! The only way I can describe it is to say that it was in the family of spells that make our magical communication mirrors work, but I have no idea what it would have connected Harry to. He was only throwing Killing Curses around." Lily was frustrated as it did not make sense. But then predicting what happened when multiple spells came together was more often an art rather than a science, and there had been three sources of magic active when Harry had been hit.

"Is Harry all right? What are you going to do about it?" Now Sirius sounded very concerned.

"Fortunately, I managed to isolate it to protect Harry, and then I removed it that night." She heard Sirius breath a sigh of relief. "I've been checking him daily, and I still don't see anything different now, other than an overall magical core power increase. Thankfully, it appears I got rid of whatever the foreign magic was."

Sirius considered that before he asked, "Or else Harry's system absorbed it?"

"I suppose that's possible. I'll keep watching him." She took a deep breath to try to clear her worry about her son. The emotional conversation had begun to wear on her. "Anything else we need to talk about now?"

"Not that I'm aware of. Are you sure that you're OK, Lily? I could leave Moony my flat and come there for a while. I can take a leave of

absence from work for a month or so." The charmer in Sirius was starting to show again as he tried to talk her into letting him help her.

"Thanks for the offer, Sirius, but I think we'll be fine." She hoped that was not a lie. "Take care of yourself and Moony. Don't let him run off by himself. I'll call you again on my birthday."

"If you're sure," he sighed. "Very well, Lily. Until midnight on the 30th of January..."

"Until then, Sirius..." Lily waved her wand over the mirror and broke the connection. She sat for a moment and kneaded her temples and then around her eyes. She needed to go wash her face. She hoped her crying would not be obvious to everyone she met that day. Of course, even if it were, the Japanese were too polite to mention it.

After cleaning up her face and the room, she went to check on Harry before she started on her daily work. As a student in a local nursing school, she was kept busy. It was an unexpected boon which she enjoyed as it helped her ignore her loss. Because of her Charms background and all the healing spells she knew, training to be a nurse was more memorization than hard work. A little extra money also had bought the proper work history showing previous nursing experience. That would speed up her schooling to become a Public Health Nurse. Over time, she could study to become a Registered Nurse.

Fortunately for her and her son, she had been able to hire an older witch to watch Harry when she was away. Between that, her time at the hotel, and the school expenses, her immediately available funds would not last as long as she had initially planned. On the plus side, she could transfigure or charm a lot of things, so her other expenses were quite low.

She expected to finish her schooling and have her Muggle nursing certificate by the end of the year. So, in another five weeks, she could move to the little house in the village that she and James had purchased. She expected it would take at least a few years for her to find any acceptance there, but as the only person in the small village with a medical background, she also hoped she would be accepted

faster than a normal outsider would. Of course, if required, some discrete magic could help her, too.

A part-time job as a nurse also had the added benefit that she could spend a lot of time with her son, at least at the beginning. In a few years, everything would change, she knew. He would have to start going to school when he was six, just like all the other Muggle children in the village. Before then, she would teach him to read and write so he would be able to do everything the other students could do. She prayed she could keep his accidental magic down to small things she could easily hide until then. That was when she planned to get him a training wand and start teaching him a little magic. That should help him with control. Thankfully, Japan was more progressive than England. There was no Underage Magical Restriction, just the basic Statute of Secrecy from the ICW.

She had a lot to learn over the next ten to fifteen years so she could teach Harry all he would need to know. He had so much to learn before they could return to England and fulfill his destiny.

((A/N: There's the premise for you. When I think it useful, I'll put little "universe notes" and maybe questions here at the end.

Why did Lily move around so much when she was on the run? I believe that Disapparation and Portkeys should be able to be followed, if you can do the Destination Revealing spell fast enough and very near the point of departure. My thought is that like ripples in a pond show where the object entered the water and fade with time, so the change in the fabric of space after a departure can be traced if you don't wait too long. Also, by using some Muggle transportation, she hoped to throw off any Death Eaters following her.

Question for everyone to think about before the next chapter: What will it mean to Harry to grow up with his mother? This will cause some very large changes from canon!Harry. :-)

Bonus question for those who like to analyze stories: What will it mean for Harry when he returns to England, having been raised by an English mother in the Japanese culture? (You can't say anything SquidTamer! :-) (Who says "AWWW!" :-)

Note, if I've done my research correctly, there really is no such city as "Heiwateki, Japan", that way I can put it anywhere. :-) "Heiwateki" can be translated to "peaceful" with tranquility also implied. (Thanks ST!)

Chapter 2 is already drafted, so hopefully it will only be 2-3 weeks before it comes out ... if I can get my act together and RealLife is kind to my betas. :-)

A dictionary of things I've made up:

"...abbas amor" - a father's love

"Ego fides" - I promise

"Signum pungo" - puncture a seal (sends a blast of energy into wards in order to bring them down, only possible by the creator of the wards)

Again, thanks to my helpers (in alpha order): JonathanAvery, moshpit, Reg, Sovran, and SquidTamer.)

((A/N: Here begins the story...

This next "virtual chapter", which will be chapters 2-4, will help you understand Harry, his "family", and the story's universe. His school friends will join us in chapter 5.

Note to the canon police. I know that Augustus Rookwood was in Azkaban from 1981 until 1996 in canon, but I need him to have kept his cover, so assume he was never turned in at the end of the first Riddle war.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome "Reg" to my beta team. He's volunteered to be my "Brit picker" and to keep me honest in that area. In addition to helping from here on out, he's also fixed chapter 1 for me, which I've just reposted. Nothing in the plot changed, but the new version is now the official one.

Finally, an apology for the length of time it took to get the chapter out. "Real Life" has not been kind to many of us recently. To make matters worse, about the time the chapter came back to me in the middle of the beta process, I lost all motivation to write for a few weeks. I've learned my lesson and I won't try to guess when the next chapter will be ready. OTOH, as the chapter has gone back and forth, it's also gained about 3500 words, so you get a longer chapter for your wait. :-)

To make up for my tardiness, I've posted a short Harry/Daphne story here on FF. It's been sitting on my hard drive for a while, so I only had to polish it before I posted.

To help those who read too much... :-) From last time:

1981-10-31:

Voldemort killed James, but Lily managed to escape with Harry. Other than Sirius, everyone else thinks she and her son are dead. The two remaining Potters escaped to their last safe house in Japan.

1981-11-19:

Lily and Sirius discuss what happened and make a few plans. The Potters will live in a small Muggle village with Lily working as a nurse.

They do not plan to return to England until Harry can fully defend himself or they must return for some other very important reason.  
))

## Chapter 2: Prelude to War (Part 1)

(Sat, 24 Feb 1996)

With a quick flick of his left hand, Harry Potter muttered, "Protego." He grunted as the attempted wandless shield failed and forced him to dive to his left to avoid a spell. "Diffindo." A pale red beam shot from his wand towards his mother across the room, she lithely dodged his spell.

"Adhaero. Expelliarmus." She shot right back at him. The grey spell caught him in mid stride and stuck his feet to the ground. His arms flailed for a second as he adjusted his balance to the awkward position, and the second spell plucked his wand from his loose grasp. His mother deftly caught the wand and smiled at him. "Good try, Harry. You almost had me with the Body Bind."

"Thanks, Mother. Now would you please unstick my feet or give me my wand so I can -- please!" The last word came out as a plaintive whine. "This is really uncomfortable." His legs were spread apart, and his muscles slowly started to burn as he was forced to maintain his uncomfortable position.

His mother smiled again and opened her left hand, balancing his wand there as she walked over to the side of the room to pick up a glass of water. Harry concentrated on his wand, thinking of summoning his wand; his lips moving slightly as he cast it. The wand jumped out of her hand and flew to him. He snatched it before it could go flying by. He pointed it at his feet and gave it the barest of movements as he muttered, "Finite!" He almost fell over backwards as his weight shifted. A chuckle came from his mother when he stumbled from the release. He glared slightly as he stood up straight again and walked over to join her for a drink.

While pleased that he was no longer in an uncomfortable position, he was not happy with the result of the training exercise. Harry knew he

would have to win every real fight he had with his enemies, yet he was not able to consistently win against his mother. He was also displeased by his ability to make his wandless shield work consistently. He had been working on it for the last six months, and it only worked about one time in five. That was better than six months ago, but the inconsistency ate at him.

"You need more experience and more creativity. Don't be afraid to use spells in unexpected ways," she said. "Creativity and independent thinking are not bad things, no matter what you've been taught in school," she gently admonished him before her tone turned to one of praise. "You really are doing much better, Harry, but experience can't be taught. Just be patient and keep trying."

He stood taller in response to her praise, and he could tell she really was happy with him. But then he frowned. "I can't believe my wandless shield still doesn't work all the time."

Lily chuckled. "Keep practicing, Harry. Even I have trouble doing that at times."

Harry nodded and stretched. He looked around their magical practice room and once again smiled at their secret. Shortly after they had moved in, his mother had spent many evenings creating a hidden room under their house. A hidden trapdoor in a closet led to this magically shielded room. No one, not even another wizard or witch, should be able to tell it was here. The room was also magically protected against stray spells so they would be safe from a cave-in. His mother had done an amazing job of creating a learning environment for him.

"Why don't you make us a couple of comfy chairs," Lily suggested, "and then we can work through the last batch of Daily Prophets and London newspapers I picked up in Tokyo yesterday." She summoned the bundle of papers and deposited them on a small conjured table while Harry conjured two lounge chairs. They each grabbed one off the top and started skimming the articles.

They did this at least once a week, skimming both Wizarding and Muggle periodicals. Harry scanned through the publications looking

for specific words and phrases he had been trained to look for. Several items such as bank robberies, a missing person in south London, and an unexplained death in the Lake District all caught his attention. He read the articles, but mostly he watched for unusual occurrences and tried to a general feel for what was happening in the world.

Across from him, his mother quickly flipped through her paper, and he watched her for a moment. It was still odd seeing his mother without her glamours on. She had an exotic look with her dark red hair framing her pale skin and her almond-shaped green eyes, which were scanning the pages of the paper in front of her. For years, Harry had struggled with the truth behind his mother's Japanese persona, Yoko Sato. He had grown up calling a dark-haired, Japanese woman his mother, and sometimes he simply could not reconcile the two. This was made worse because almost the only time he saw her looking like she naturally should was when they were duelling.

His mother no longer allowed them to duel with their glamours on. "In a battle," she had often admonished him, "the smallest delay or distraction can cause you to lose. In England, we won't be fighting as Yoko and Katsurou. In fact, we will not be able to hide as we are now. A stray Finite Incantatem could be disastrous."

As in all things, Harry had deferred to his mother on that point. After walking into their home several times as a young boy and finding Lily Potter instead of Yoko Sato, he understood how costly that moment of surprise could be. They had almost lost their cover once when he brought a friend home from school. Luckily, his mother had reluctantly modified the boy's memory, but still, the paranoid caution his mother's daily lessons had ingrained in him was all too necessary.

Harry did not doubt the threat that Voldemort's supporters or the Wizarding world in general could pose to him and his mother. He had known of the destiny that awaited him back in England for years. For a time, he had been angry that destiny had been forced upon him, but he had left behind the folly of youth and come to grips with that part of his life years ago. That destiny was now a simple duty, a matter of family honour. No, what scared him most was that he would make a

mistake or find himself unable to meet his mother's standards, and she would be killed because of his failure.

He could never allow that. He had no family other than his mother. There were Uncle Sirius and Uncle Remus, his mother's old friends, but they were just voices he heard every few months through a magical mirror. Harry knew his uncles cared for him, but it was not the same. The sacrifices his mother had made for his safety were humbling. Harry doubted he could ever do what she had done, and that was a debt he tried to repay every single day.

Harry noticed his mother's lips were drawn in a thin line as she read. Something in the paper bothered her. But of course, for the last year she had become increasingly agitated and short when she read the news. His training, both magical and physical, had picked up as well. Both of them could read the signs, and since she had lived through the first war, Harry was certain that his mother saw more than he did. They would be returning to England soon. He could feel it. With a sigh, Harry returned to his papers.

After nearly twenty minutes, Lily put down the last of the papers and looked at her son. "Well?"

"It's looking slightly worse, although the Prophet doesn't seem to see it that way." She waved her hand to get him to continue. "There's an article from last Tuesday about a family's house burning down. Although they made it out safely, the head of the family is a member of the Wizengamot."

"So, you think ...?" she asked and motioned for Harry to carry it to the conclusion.

"I think they were being pressured and initially refused, so their house was set on fire. There is no quote from them, so that seems to reinforce the idea to me; they didn't want to say anything to the reporters which might make their situation worse."

"I agree," she said, and he seemed to sit up a little straighter. "What else?"

"Not much else here that I can find, but I'm concerned with the number of unsolved robberies I saw in the Daily Telegraph last week. I think that's Him trying to raise more money. How else do you explain things like a jewellery store robbery in the middle of the day that the employees don't remember happening? Or, when they check the video cameras, they find that the electronic circuitry was fried?"

She nodded. "An excellent point and well argued. I believe I would agree with you on that, too." He smiled again before he took a drink of water.

Harry took pleasure in the act of working through a problem well, or really anything that pleased his mother; but being intellectually clever and arguing well was one of his simple pleasures. He even occasionally debated one of his friends just for the fun of debate and to see how far he could take an argument to its logical conclusion.

Of course, trying to analyse what was happening in the war and then planning what should be done was an intellectual exercise whose complexity boggled his mind. He was very glad to have his mother's help and training for that.

Lily pointed at the paper in her hand. "I found one other thing in the Prophet. There was an article about the Department of Magical Regulation being behind in approving new houses. Considering how easy that is to do, I have to wonder if there's something else happening there." She looked at him to see if he wanted to tackle the question.

Harry considered the problem. After several long seconds, he shook his head.

"This is where experience helps, as this was not an uncommon thing during the first war," she explained. "But if I was there, I'd check the people in that department for signs of being under the Imperius Curse. It tends to reduce your efficiency."

He lightly smacked the side of his head. "That's right, you've explained that before. I'm sorry..."

"Don't worry about it, Harry, but do try not to forget. It's one of the enemy's best tools, especially if their agent is someone who is well respected and can move in many circles, as well as having a lot of will power to make the curse successful and well hidden." He nodded as he absorbed the information. "If the agent has quite a bit more will power than his victim, then the victim will act quite normally -- at least for a while."

"Right, and if the instructions are too different from their normal behaviour, you get either unusual looks on the person's face or inconsistent behaviour after a short time," he finished for her.

Lily Potter thought about the situation a little more as she downed the last of her water. "That sort of thing is becoming more common, even if the Ministry is trying to get the Prophet to hide it. I'm starting to wonder if it's time for us to go back."

"To England?" Harry asked. Since the increase in suspicious activity, his mother had made excuse after excuse not to return. The sudden change of heart caught Harry by surprise.

"Yes. You're doing quite well, and I'm not sure how much more I can teach you, Harry. Despite the trouble I give you when we duel, I believe you can hold your own against most adults and the average Death Eater recruit. You really need the experience of fighting lots of different people, and that's not going to be happening here."

He nodded as he too tried to predict what might happen. "You have a point. Suki and her parents are about the only other people I can practice with. They've taught me many useful skills, although few apply to the training in defence that I need, and I cannot impose on them more." He considered the problem for a moment more before his face brightened. "How about that Auror you got to help me with the Unforgivables last year? Could he help train me more?"

"No," she shook her head. "That was a one-time thing for him, and I Obliviated him, too, just to be safe. Besides, just because he showed you how to handle the Unforgivables does not mean he would be good in a fight or a war." She stopped and smiled. "But I do know an

Auror in England who is quite good, and I know he'd be willing to help us.

"We'll talk to Sirius about this during our next call. Come on, Harry, up and at 'em. We've got more practicing to do." Harry groaned good-naturedly as he got up. He Vanished the chairs and table, and the newspapers floated over to the side of the room.

Lily started conjuring various little things and scattering them around the room. Soon rocks, a plant, a beetle, a glass of water, and a stick dotted the floor.

"For this exercise, I want you to use these things, but only after they've been transfigured. Be creative, too... Go!" She dodged to her right as a water balloon came at her from where the glass of water had been. She smiled as her son worked hard at this lesson. She was very proud of him. One day, she was sure she would be prouder still.

(Sun, 10 Mar)

Lily tried not to think about what would have been her husband's thirty-sixth birthday in ten days as she set up the traditional table with the same old picture from fifteen years ago in front of their little mirror. Harry had been such a small baby at that time, and it always surprised her how big he had grown in so little time. And just as Harry had grown, so too had the number of times they called her old friends in England. The fourth time, Remus' birthday, had been added after they had told Remus the secret three months after she and Harry had relocated to Japan. Several years ago, they had added a fifth time to call, but that was not until the 21st of May.

Harry joined her just as the mirror came to life. "Lily? Harry?"

"Hey, Uncle Sirius!" Harry said. "Is everyone there?"

"Harry, my lad. Good to hear your voice."

"Uncle Remus! Happy Birthday!"

"Thanks, Harry," the werewolf said.

"And don't forget your Aunt, now," a female voice playfully chastised him.

"Aunt Zoe!"

"How are you, Zoe?" Lily asked Sirius's wife with concern.

"Feeling fat. I know I'm half done, but it still feels like it will be forever before this child gets here."

Zoe Martin had been a Ravenclaw one year behind Sirius at Hogwarts, and she had joined St Mungo's after finishing school. Sirius worked as a professional broom tester. It was that job, or rather his injuries on the job, that had reintroduced Sirius to Zoe. Sirius had arrived at St Mungo's half-dead from an accident on an experimental broom, and Zoe had been assigned his case. By the time he left the hospital, he had a date with her, and a year later they had been married.

"Are you going to be here for his birth?" Sirius asked. There was hope in his voice, but there was also a resigned quality that assumed he would be rebuffed again.

"Perhaps..." Lily started, her voice conveying her uncertainty.

"Really?!" Sirius asked.

"Yes, maybe. It's one of the things I want to talk about with all of you." When no one said anything for a few seconds, Lily pressed forward. "I don't like what I'm seeing in the Prophet, although I'm sure they're not printing the worst of it."

There was an uncomfortable silence for a few moments. "No, Lily," Sirius finally answered, "I don't think they are telling us everything, just like they haven't told us about his getting a new body last summer. You-Know-Who..."

"Sirius!" Lily growled.

"Sorry, Lily, it was just old habit," Sirius apologised. "Riddle still hasn't been publicly sighted yet. His fingerprints are everywhere, but people won't open their eyes to see. Several people have been found to be under the Imperius Curse in the Ministry. There are numerous cases of random violence and deaths, and all the victims have positions of power or influence..."

"Don't forget the Muggles," Remus said. "A lot of strange things are going on there, but the Ministry just ignores them all."

"Yeah," Harry said, "I've noticed quite a few robberies where they can't explain what happened other than money or jewels are missing."

"Exactly," Remus agreed. "Tom is hiding his tracks well, but they are there. If only the Ministry would acknowledge it and start preparing for this war before it's already lost." He sounded frustrated.

Zoe finally spoke up. "Christmas was the worst. I can't believe they discounted us so quickly."

"You mean when you had to defend the Department of Mysteries?" Lily asked.

"Yes," Remus answered. "We did prevent Tom from getting into the Department, but unfortunately he left before anyone outside of the Order could see him. I'm not sure how Albus was able to get us off the hook for that, considering how much Fudge doesn't like him right now."

"At least the Ministry acknowledged that there was a break-in," Zoe said with relief in her voice. "Now that they've posted guards, the Order doesn't have to be there all the time. You don't know how relieved that makes me feel not to have you two hiding down there watching that long hallway."

"The bottom line, Lily, is that it is getting worse, but it's not as bad as the first war was at the end," Sirius said. "So is this why you're thinking of coming back? To help us stop it before it gets any worse?"

"That's part of it," Lily said. She looked at her son as she explained, "I'm also thinking that Harry needs some real experience in fighting, as well as a level of instruction that is beyond what I can teach him, at least in a few subjects."

"You're actually going to enrol him in Hogwarts?" Remus asked. "I never thought I'd see the day."

"I'm thinking about it, or at least with some conditions," Lily said with the reservation blatant in her voice.

"Do I get to tell Dumbledore?" Sirius asked, his tone completely mischievous.

"Why? You think he'll keel over or something?" Lily wondered, a grin appearing on her face, even though only Harry could see it.

"Probably. I also sort of wonder how long it will take him to realise I'm not trying to prank him." Sirius laughed. "Oh yeah, this could be a lot of fun."

"Sirius? You've got to make him give you a promise to keep our existence secret for as long as possible," Lily said. "In fact, I'd like Harry to take his OWLs there under an assumed name, and then fix his name later after he starts school."

"Right, I can do that."

"Honey, you better write it down," Zoe said with a beleaguered sigh.

There was a pause, and Lily could not help but chuckle as she guessed at the glare Sirius was shooting at his wife. A resigned, "Fine," was finally muttered through the mirror.

"Let's call him ... Charles Evans," Lily finally decided. She now heard the scratching of a quill and the name repeated softly. "I'm also going to want Dumbledore to promise individual tutoring for Defence, Charms, and Transfiguration." More scratching noises were made.

"Got it. Anything else?" Sirius asked.

"No, I think that will do it for now. I may add more later. How long until you can talk to him?" Lily asked. She scribbled on a small notepad as she waited, planning out the next few months.

"I'll Floo call him tomorrow," Sirius said. "I can probably get everything set the way you want within a couple of weeks. He might need some time to see about the OWL scores and switching the name."

"Fine, same time on the 24th of this month then," Lily proposed.

"Sounds good. Everything else going well there?"

"Yeah, it's great," Harry said. "I'm starting to learn healing spells. It's pretty amazing what can be done with them."

"You mean like healing your enemies wounds?" Sirius snorted before slipping into laughter, which Remus joined a moment later.

Harry and Lily heard a light slap and a yelp from Sirius. He looked at his mother and they both chuckled. "I'll let Aunt Zoe educate you, Uncle Sirius. If you're lucky, she'll also put you back together when she's done with you." He snickered under his breath. Teasing his Uncle Sirius was one of life's little pleasures.

"Yeah, right. You can come here, midget, and practice your duelling with me. I'll show you how it's done," Sirius boasted.

"Midget?" he asked with indignation before his voice became more cheerful. "I think I'd like to. Can I, Mother? Can I?"

"Hey, wait a minute, why does he sound so happy about that?" Sirius asked as Remus howled in the background and Zoe's tinkling laughter floated above the commotion.

With her chuckles finally dying off, Lily answered him. "Because he thinks you'd be an easy target."

Sirius now had a suspicious tone. "Hey, what have you been telling him?"

"Not much," Lily said nonchalantly, "except that between you, Remus, and James, you were the easiest to beat."

"That's so not true!" Sirius said, while his friends laughed. "It's not! I always held my own and gave back better than I got," he told them indignantly.

"Right, you just keep thinking that, Sirius," Remus assured his friend before he started laughing again.

Lily and Harry heard a noise and some arguing, but it was indistinct.

An exasperated sigh came through the mirror. "Lily?" Zoe's voice called out. "I guess this is the end until the call in two weeks. Those two are on the floor wrestling, if you can believe that. I swear, he's never going to grow up."

Lily laughed, and Harry fought to keep his mirth quiet. "Just hang on a little while longer, Zoe. My husband changed almost overnight when Harry was born. I know Sirius matured a little after your first, and I suspect he'll mature more after this new one comes."

"I hope you're right, Lily," came the wistful reply. "I really hope you're right."

"Take care, Zoe, and tell those two prats we'll talk in two weeks."

"You two take care, too. I'll make sure Sirius calls Dumbledore tomorrow. Bye."

"Good-night."

"Bye Aunt Zoe!" Harry looked at his mother as she ended the call on their side. "What about my school here? The new school year begins in April."

"I know," she told him. She got up and began putting the magic mirror away while Harry Vanished the conjured sheet. "At this time, I believe I'll pull you out after you finish your exams in a few weeks. I'll tell them we're about to take an extended trip to visit ancestors that I recently found and you'll finish school there. In the couple of months before you leave, you can concentrate on studying for your OWLs."

"Yes!" Harry hissed.

"I'll pick up your book list from school so you can look over next year's material even if you aren't attending that school," she told him, barely keeping in a smile.

"Aww, Mum. I like going to school to see my friends, but doing classes for both normal school and Magical school is really tedious."

As Lily finished cleaning up, she looked at her son with no sympathy at all. "Life is not fair, Harry. If it was, we'd still have your father, and we'd all be in England enjoying ourselves. Now, don't you have some final projects due soon?"

Harry's stomach twisted in guilt for reminding his mother about his missing father. He contritely answered, "Yes, Mother. I should finish my research essay on 'Economics in the Asian Region' today." Harry went over to the computer and turned it on.

While he waited for it to boot, he drummed his fingers impatiently. He had a lot going on, but he was able to handle it all, barely. Despite what his mother threatened him with a few minutes ago, he was sure she would lower the priority on his normal school work if he were not enrolled in those classes. On the other hand, she would probably push harder on his Wizarding studies. He was not worried too much about his OWLs. He could have taken them a year ago and done quite well. He was doing NEWT level work in all of his subjects, although he had just started that level in a few of them.

There was also the issue of his friends and "family" to consider, mostly Aki and Suki.

Aki was his best friend, or his best mate if Harry understood English slang correctly. They did practically everything together. They attended classes together, and they also spent most of Harry's free time together after school. One of their favourite activities was riding Aki's motorcycle through the woods and exploring together. That was bending the law slightly, but they did their best to stay off the roads to avoid trouble.

He knew he would miss Suki too. She was his only magical friend, her family being the only other Wizarding family in the village. They had tried being boyfriend and girlfriend for a short while about a year ago, but they had decided they were better off as just good friends.

Her parents were nice and very helpful. They had been teaching Harry and his mother the Japanese view of magic for the last couple of years. It was different from the magic his mother taught him. The Japanese way seemed to be both weaker and yet more powerful, sort of like the Aikido he had recently started. The dichotomy in both the magic and the sport fascinated him.

There were times when Harry could lose himself in his Aikido sessions. The flowing, graceful power was very peaceful. It was a calming state of mind, much like his Occlumency. The practice of Aikido felt so like magic at times that he wondered if the original Sensei was a wizard.

Then there was "Ojii", or Kabata-san as most people knew him. Harry loved his old neighbour like a grandfather, and despite the man's quarrelsome nature, Harry knew the old man loved him. He assumed it was because Ojii's children rarely visited him so he viewed Harry as his own grandson, but the older man had never said anything directly. Nor would Harry would ever ask.

Lastly, Harry would miss O-Sensei. His karate master was getting quite old, but he was as wise and gentle as he was exacting. Harry was worked hard in training sessions, but afterwards, he would sometimes also have tea with his master and do small projects for him. Harry wondered if O-Sensei did this because Harry had no father, but he did not know. To Harry, O-Sensei was his revered grandfather, much like Ojii.

He would definitely miss his friends and honorary family here. With a sigh, Harry started working on his school report, hoping to finish it that day with enough time left over to go see Aki. Maybe they could ride his friend's motorbike through the woods for a while. If not, maybe he could go flying this evening after it got dark.

(Sun, 24 Mar)

Lily brought out her mirror and set up the table and tableau as usual.

"Lily?"

"Sirius? You're early." The man was almost never on time.

"Yep. Hey, kiddo, it's just me and Remus this time. Zoe's feeling really tired and she has a shift at St Mungo's tomorrow."

"You have some broom tests coming up tomorrow, too, don't you?" Lily asked.

Lily could easily guess that they were rolling their eyes on the other side of the mirror in the pause. "Yes," he finally drawled. "Are you done teasing me now? Or shall I just hang up and not tell you what I found out?"

"Uncle Sirius! You have to tell me!" Harry spoke up eagerly.

"Well, for you, kiddo, I will. Now if someone else can keep quiet..."

Lily huffed. "Fine. So tell us, Padfoot, what did the would-be wise one say?"

At that, Sirius laughed. "You really should have been there, Lily. I met with our esteemed Headmaster a couple of days after our last call. Fortunately, it wasn't hard to get him to promise to keep the conversation confidential. He was as twinkly as ever, at least until I told him that I was there on behalf of you. When he crooked his bushy eyebrow at me, I told him that you, Lily Potter, wanted to bring

Harry Potter to take his OWLs in June. For a minute, I thought he was going to have a stroke or maybe a heart attack he went so pale."

"You really need to see the memory, Lily," Remus said. "His re-telling does not do it proper justice."

A laugh escaped Lily. "I shall hold you to that."

"You can borrow my family Pensieve for it," Sirius said. "Anyway, after he initially recovered, it took me nearly ten minutes and an oath to convince him that I wasn't trying to prank him. Then he got the strangest look on his face before he started laughing. All he would say was, 'Tom's going to love this.'"

Lily could not contain her laughter. "Yes, I'm sure Voldemort will have a conniption when he finds out Harry is alive. What did Albus say to my demands?"

"Surprisingly, or at least to me, he said yes to every single one with almost no thought. No matter what I asked, I could not get him to elaborate," Sirius said.

"He's probably starting to weave some elaborate scheme to do Tom in," Remus said.

"No doubt," Lily agreed. "But he did agree to the basic plan, and we can take care of things from there as long as he cooperates."

"Yes!" Sirius shouted. "The Marauders will ride again!"

Lily just looked at her son and slowly shook her head in disbelief. Harry grinned at her. Looking at the backside of the mirror, she tried to finish up. "I guess we'll be seeing you in June, then. We can work out details during our May call."

"Sounds good. Albus said you should come the night before OWLs start. He'll be sending me some more details with an owl later. It'll be so good to see you two again." The grin in Sirius's voice was obvious.

"It'll be good to see you two reprobates again, too, as well as to see Zoe. You take care of her, Sirius," Lily encouraged him.

"I will, Lily; I promise," he told her fervently.

"It will be good see you, too, Lily," Remus chimed in.

"And you, Moony," she softly said.

"Yeah, I'll get to go to England finally!" Harry shouted. The adults all laughed as they said their good-byes.

(Sun, 5 Jun)

"Ready?" Lily Potter asked her son. He looked ready, but it was always best to ask a travelling partner.

Harry shrunk his trunk down and stuck the walnut-sized box in his pocket. His mother already had her shrunken trunk in her pocket. "Ready," he said with an easy grin. He grabbed the end of the quill she was holding.

Despite his grin, Lily saw the worry in his eyes and the tense set of his shoulders. It was not easy to leave the familiar for the unknown. She was proud of her little boy. No, she amended as took a good look at him; he was a young man now. He stood slightly taller than her and was almost the spitting image of his father. Now that he was older, the similarity always gave her a faint pang, but she was mostly used to it now. Sometimes it was particularly strong, like now as they prepared to do something new and big, and at those times she wondered if she would ever really get over the pain of losing James. To make matters slightly worse this time, she was about to run into two more reminders of her husband.

With her free hand, she pulled her wand out and touched it to the middle of the quill. "To Padfoot!" Harry felt the pull behind his navel, and the Portkey whisked them away in a swirl of colour.

After what seemed like at least half a minute, they landed on the front porch of an old, stately house. The house stood out like a flower

amongst the wizened and decrepit town-homes that gathered about it like weeds. The door had "#12" on it, and the lion-headed knocker Sirius had mentioned eyed them warily. His mother reached up and used the knocker to announce their presence.

Scarcely had the knocker stilled than the door was yanked open to reveal a man with long dark brown hair pulled back into a pony-tail, grinning at them like there was no tomorrow. The man had the refined features of the younger man that had stood next to Harry's father in the countless pictures his mother had shown him. It could only be his Uncle Sirius.

"Lily!" The exuberant voice echoed down the street, and Sirius engulfed his mother in a hug.

"Sirius..." she wheezed, unable to say more because of his strong arms around her.

Sirius finally let her go so she could inhale, but he did not apologise. His eyes glistened with unshed tears. "Merlin, it's just so good to see you again after all this time." Lily did not say anything, and Harry assumed she was caught up in the moment. The goofy grin stayed on Sirius's face as he turned to the young man

"Who else could you be but Harry!" Sirius stepped forward and gave him a hug, too. Harry stiffened slightly at the overly familiar contact, but returned it after catching his mother's nod. He had no memories of this man beyond their mirror conversations, just photos and stories from his mother. "You've grown so much since you were the toddler I last saw. Come in, both of you!" Sirius closed the door and started walking towards a doorway. "This way!" He bounced with each step like an excited child at Christmas.

Harry looked at his mother for guidance, but she just smiled and followed their host. Her eyes glistened in the flickering light of the hallway, but Harry was unsure whether that was from the reunion or old memories.

The house was definitely a lot bigger on the inside than it looked from the outside. Magic made such fun things possible, Harry mused. It

was very stately, with lots of intricate woodwork and nice furnishings. The décor was a balance of formal and comfortable. The Blacks were an old Pureblood family, which accounted for the formality. Harry assumed Aunt Zoe had made it comfortable.

Soon they were in the sitting room, where they found another man with light brown hair peppered with grey. Based on his mother's photos, this was his other honorary uncle.

Across from him, sitting in a comfortable lounge chair, were a very pregnant woman with dark blonde hair and a little boy with dark brown hair who was worming his way into the woman's lap despite her best attempts at stopping him

Harry could only assume she was his Aunt Zoe.

"Lily!" Remus jumped to his feet and quickly strode over to give her a hug, too, which his mother returned. They held each other for slightly longer than Sirius had hugged her.

"Remus, it's so good to see you again," she told him in a voice chocked with emotion. "I'm sorry it's been so long..." She wiped at her eyes and then smiled at everyone in the room.

"Lily, no need to apologise." Remus struggled with his emotions, too, before he turned to Harry. "And Harry, I'm sure you don't remember me personally, but I have enjoyed getting the chance to talk to you over the years." He walked over to Harry, who stiffened slightly. There was a moment of hesitation and then understanding in Remus gray eyes. He smiled and clapped Harry on the shoulder. "You remind me of your father so much." The man's voice was easily recognisable.

"Uncle Remus, it's nice to finally meet you." Harry turned to the woman. "I am Harry Potter; you must be Aunt Zoe." He walked over to where she was sitting and gave a slight bow. "Thank you for allowing us to intrude on your home." Harry reached into his robe and pulled out a small box. Tapping it with his wand, it grew to its normal size before he handed it to her.

"Thank you, Harry. It's so good to meet you. Ooh, Swiss chocolate," Zoe smiled at him after she looked at the box. "You didn't need to do this, but the thought is appreciated. There really is no need to be so formal," Zoe said. Putting words into actions, she pulled Harry down into a warm hug. "I've been waiting for you to come, as has Sirius." They both looked over to the beaming godfather. The woman looked over to his mother. "Lily, it's so good to see you again. I'm sorry for not getting up..."

"Zoe," Lily walked over and gave her old school acquaintance a hug. "Don't worry about it. I understand -- completely. You have what? One more month?"

"Yes," she said with a hint of exasperation as she rubbed her swollen stomach. "Time is dragging terribly."

"And yet, you'll be very happy when the baby finally arrives, I'm sure," Lily encouraged her.

"Lastly," Zoe now did her best to move the squirming child in front of her. "This is James Remus Black -- our eldest," she announced proudly. "He's three years old."

"I'm almost four!" The boy stood up straight and puffed out his chest.

Harry looked at his godfather, who glowed with pride, and Harry had to suppress a laugh. Leaning down again, he stuck out his hand. "Hello, I'm Harry, your cousin. It's nice to meet you, James."

With only a little prompting from his father, the boy finally managed to shyly say, "Hello," before he hid behind his father's legs. Lily waved at him, which caused the boy to wrap himself in his father's robes. The others all chuckled.

Zoe looked at her husband. "Sirius? Please play host." She looked at him expectantly.

He looked lost for a second before he brightened. "Oh, right! I'll get the tea." Sirius extracted himself from his son, who ran to Remus, so he could get the refreshments. Sirius turned back to the group.

"Would anyone like something to eat? Dinner will be in about two hours if anyone is interested."

Harry shyly raised his hand. It had been over six hours since he had had dinner at home, and he was starving. Fortunately, he had also had a nap earlier that evening and was wide awake. Travelling nine time zones in less than a minute had its hazards.

When Sirius returned with the tea, the group settled into chairs, and Lily became all business. "Sirius, did you make arrangements for a little trip tonight?"

The old marauder gave a wicked grin. "Yes -- I -- did." He emphasised each word before he started laughing. When he managed to contain himself, he explained. "My cousin, actually my cousin once removed, Nymphadora Tonks, arranged to have guard duty tonight. Our old friends will come and join us, too, and we can have a bit of a party to secure ourselves a little more."

"Excellent, Sirius, thank you," Lily said and then returned Sirius' smile with one that put his to shame. "I have a wonderful prank for all of you."

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After the late dinner, the adults conscripted Harry for washing-up duty while his mother and the rest retired to the living room. He assumed they wanted some privacy and deferred to his mother's request. If anything important was discussed, he knew that she would eventually tell him. It only took a few spells to send all the dirty dishes through the washing cycle and then float the dishes over to the drying rack. Once complete, he returned to the living room, where he rejoined them as if he had never left.

All three adult residents were speaking quietly as he entered, and his mother pointed to a chair near her, so Harry took a seat and joined the conversation. The next couple of hours were spent discussing the news in England. Harry found few surprises from the assumptions his mother and he had made from various news sources. However, the

different perspective of Remus, Zoe, and Sirius cleared up several questions.

Shortly before the clock struck midnight, the fireplace flared, and green flames burst to life. Harry reached for his wand, but none of the adults even blinked in concern. Figuring that they had discussed a visitor while he was washing up, Harry left his wand hidden but kept his hand nearby.

A couple stepped out of the fireplace. The man had a kind face with brown hair and brown eyes. The woman was a pretty, round-faced woman that reminded Harry of his own mother. Although the woman appeared to be a few years younger than the man, both were near his mother's age. Surprisingly, Harry recognised them. Although they were older now, they were not much different from the pictures his mother had shown him. Unfortunately, he could not remember their names. Harry's surprise quickly vanished, but the couple were struck dumb as they stared at him and his mother. He heard his mother say something from his left, but he did not move his gaze from the visitors.

"Lily?" the woman asked, her hand covering her mouth. She looked as if she had seen a ghost. She took a step forward. "Is it really you? This isn't some joke?" She glanced at Sirius and then Zoe, who shook her head.

Lily stood up and smiled. "It's me, Alice. Really." Harry nodded in understanding and relaxed. The woman was Alice Longbottom, an old friend of his mother, and the man would be her husband, Frank. They were the parents of the other one.

With a sob, Alice raced past her husband and to her old friend, who stood to meet her. "Lily," she finally said again after a sniffle, tears were starting to come down her face. "I can't believe you're alive and you didn't let us know."

"I'm so very sorry, Alice. I've really missed you," Lily said. Tears glistened on her face, too. "But after what happened, we had to go deeper into hiding and not tell anyone. You know how it was then."

"I do," Alice agreed as she pulled back. "Oh, I'm so glad you're alive and back, although a part of me thinks I must be dreaming this. We have so much to catch up on." She finally let go of her friend.

The woman's husband slowly came over and gathered Lily into a hug after Alice released her. Harry could only watch and wonder at why the Longbottoms were here and why his mother had brought her old friends into the secret of them being back. He supposed the prophecy had brought them together. In thinking some more, he suddenly remembered back to their May "call" and Uncle Sirius mentioning needing the help of their most trusted friends and his mother agreeing. This must be them he reasoned.

He watched Alice turn to him as her husband hugged his mother and spoke a few quiet words to her. To Harry's surprise, the woman grabbed his shoulders and looked him up and down for a moment before she pulled him in for a hug. He stifled his immediate desire to pull back. Could she not have asked first?

"Hello, Harry," Alice said. "I'm sure you don't remember me, but I'm Alice Longbottom. I'm your godmother." She released him and held him at arm's length as she studied him some more. She shook her head slightly in wonder. "My, it's so good to see you again, Harry." Harry was stunned that his mother had never told him about this relationship. He looked at her for an explanation, but she was busy talking with Frank. With a sigh, Harry decided to ask her later.

As Alice released him, the man held out his hand. "Harry, I'm Frank Longbottom. It's nice to see you again. You definitely are not the young one I remember," he said with a nostalgic smile. "You look so much like James did..."

"But with Lily's eyes," Alice interrupted. "Frank is right, you've turned into a fine looking young man, just like your dad."

Harry glanced at his mother, looking for help, but she had a far away look and a sad smile. He could easily guess why. "Thank you. I've seen pictures of both of you, but they were from shortly after my parents' wedding."

Alice laughed. "Oh yes, we were so much younger then." She turned and crossed her arms in front of her. "Sirius Black! I can't believe that you didn't tell me that my godson was still alive!" She was not quite yelling, but it was obvious she was irate.

Sirius held up his hands, "Alice, I couldn't... You don't understand..." he tried to explain, remorse clearly written on his face.

"He's right," Lily said, coming to Sirius's rescue. "He took an oath to keep my secret, so he literally couldn't tell you. I'm really and truly sorry, Alice. After what happened to us, I took as few chances as possible. Even Albus only found out about our existence about three months ago."

Alice Longbottom scowled at her old friend and then at Harry's godfather. The distasteful look finally dissolved into acceptance. "I do understand." She looked at Lily. "Did you hear about what happened to us?"

"You mean about the Lestranges and Crouch Jr coming after your family?" Frank and Alice both nodded and their expressions darkened. "I'm sorry to say it, but that was another reason why we didn't tell anyone who didn't need to know. It took me a couple of months to decide to tell Remus, and Zoe didn't find out until after she had been married to this old dog," she pointed at Sirius, "for nearly a year."

"I couldn't decide whether to hit him for not telling me something like that, or be proud of him for protecting his friends," Zoe said with a teasing smile on her face as she looked at her husband.

"So, you're back, and it's time to start taking the initiative?" Frank asked.

"Yes. I think it's time," Lily said. For a moment, she studied her two friends before setting her jaw as she came to some decision. "Frank, Alice, I know that on some official scorecard somewhere, Albus is our leader, but there are some things I'm not willing to leave to him. He has a good heart, perhaps too good; I don't trust him to do everything that needs to be done."

"I'm not sure I understand. We got the..." Frank paused and glanced at Harry. "...the old crowd back together days after His return. With the Ministry being obstinate, though, we've got our hands tied."

"So Albus has you just watching and waiting, doesn't he?" Lily asked. "You're all just waiting for Voldemort to make the first move, letting him take the initiative, aren't you?"

"What else are we supposed to do?" Alice asked. "We can't go out and just attack him. We need him to show himself first."

Lily stared at Frank and Alice, her gaze unwavering.

"You can't be serious. We don't even know where he is, or who all the Death Eaters are," Frank said.

"Then find them."

"How?"

Lily flung up her hands. "This is what I mean. You're doing nothing while Voldemort is building his forces up and amassing a war chest from stolen jewellery and probably other crimes. How hard would it be to send a few Order members to every jewellery shop in the country and put tracking spells on the valuables? Or to ward the doors to detect magic and alert you?"

"It's illegal to do that, Lily," Remus said. "We have to be careful."

Lily spun on Remus, and he shrank from the anger in her eyes. "And when he shows up to kill you, do you think he or any of his sadistic followers will care what is legal?"

"We can't become what we are fighting," Frank said.

"That's Albus talking," Lily said. "And if you keep following his path, you will all be dead. This is a war and you cannot fight a war without using your weapons."

"That's not fair, Lily," Remus said.

"No, it's not," Lily said. "But life isn't fair. War isn't fair. If the generation before us had done the right thing, Voldemort would have been taken care of while he was still a minor problem. If we had taken the offensive and dealt with Voldemort the first time around instead of hiding and watching, we wouldn't be here today having this conversation. And I wouldn't have to be worried about my son's future. We will take care of this so that Harry's children won't have to deal with it."

Harry sank deeper into his chair, willing himself to remain completely still. Everyone seemed to have ignored him after the greeting, and he hoped they would continue to do so while he listened. For the moment, he only moved his eyes between the three main participants. His mother, who burned hot with her fervour, was caught up in her words, almost oblivious to those around her. His godmother stared at his mother as if trying to determine who this person was while at the same time leaning forward, captivated by the debate. Frank Longbottom was slowly nodding, his face screwed up in thought. And then, like the sun from behind a cloud, he found his answer.

"You don't think Dumbledore will make the really difficult choices, do you?" Frank asked.

"No, I don't." Lily turned to Alice. "What has Albus done to help Neville?"

Alice looked sharply at her. "But ... he doesn't have to do that!"

"Not anymore," Lily said, "but Albus has known about this for fifteen years now and only known about my survival for three months. Other than putting us both into hiding when the search got too close, what has he done with the warning?" Alice remained silent. "I'm sure he's been working behind the scenes trying to get people to put their differences aside and to work together. That's admirable, really, but you and I both know it won't be enough. What has he done for the boy he knew about? I've been training Harry for most of his life. What has Albus done for Neville?"

The silence hung in the air as Lily stared at her friend. Harry shifted uncomfortably. He could feel the precarious weight of this moment, and it was as if his mother knew that it was up to Alice Longbottom. Sirius, Remus, and Zoe watched the episode play out with great interest. Harry knew they did not know the prophecy. Lily had explained there was one but that they were all safer not knowing what it said. Everyone stared at Alice as she worked through the blunt question with her eyes closed.

And then, with the agonising speed of the first crack on an icy lake, a tear slid down her cheek and she shook her head. "Nothing," Alice said in a choked whisper. "Absolutely nothing." There was a hint of anger in her voice as she opened her watery eyes and looked at her friend. "Frank's done it all. He's been the only person to try to make a difference. He worked with Neville for the year before Hogwarts, and he's continued during the summers. Even I haven't done much other than try to bolster his confidence. Last summer was the worst, after that wretched Tournament. I just..." her voice broke. She took a deep breath. "I just didn't want to believe it was him, my Neville. I'm so sorry, Lily..."

Lily walked over to her friend and enveloped her in a hug. Although she whispered, the room was so quiet that everyone still heard. "It's all right, Alice. It's really all right. I'm not happy about it all either, but I've learned to deal with it. If it's within my power to make it so, Harry will survive and defeat Voldemort," she said fiercely.

"Damn right he will," Sirius said. "My godson is the best, and he'll accomplish the task." When Alice looked at him, he told her, "I don't know what the prophecy says, Alice, but I do know there is one. Given that, it's not hard to figure out that it talks about someone being able to kill You-Know-Who..."

"Sirius!" Lily barked.

"Sorry." He hung his head in submission, but his eyes glittered as he watched Lily. With a long-suffering sigh, Lily just shook her head, and Sirius bounced back. "But I'm sure that Harry will kill Tom Riddle, and he'll go on to give us lots of little ones for me to spoil." That got several chuckles, and Harry knew his face was red. "And I'll be there

for him every step of the way, no matter what it takes." Remus and Zoe nodded their agreement.

Still encircled in Lily's arms, Alice patted Lily's arm and said, "All right, Lily, we'll follow your lead, wherever it takes us."

Lily tightened her hug and pressed her cheek to Alice's. grin spread across Lily's face. "Then let's take care of it. Do you have the orb I asked for?"

Frank reached into his robes and pulled out a glass ball that fit nicely into the palm of his hand. He handed it over to Lily. She turned to Harry.

"Harry, we need to send a message to someone. We're going to replace the prophecy at the Ministry with this one. Hopefully, we'll deny that monster this knowledge, because knowledge is power." A look of amusement came over her. "Do you want to make up the message to the Dork Lord, or shall I?"

Harry snickered. His mother often made up derogatory names for Voldemort. Harry always enjoyed it because it was one of the few humorous things she did. He paused for a moment before he smiled at her. "How about: Thank you for calling, but the prophecy you wish to hear is no longer in service. Please call the Minister for Magic for more information."

Sirius, Remus, Zoe, and Lily burst into laughter. Frank and Alice shrugged their shoulders, although they did look amused.

"I assume that's a joke of some kind?" Frank asked.

Remus finished laughing first. "It's a parody of what you get told when you make a Muggle telephone call to a number that's not working anymore."

"I remember being at Moony's one day when he tried to teach me how to use a telephone. I dialled the wrong number, and he let me listen to that message," Sirius said with a big grin on his face. "May I supply the memory, Lily?"

Her smile did not fade, and she handed the orb to Harry. "You may, but we need to disguise it first. It would be very bad for us if Tom knew who did this."

Harry grinned. "I have an idea, Mother. May I?" She nodded. "Uncle Sirius, do you have some old Daily Prophets?"

Shrugging, Sirius went over to a stack of newspapers near the fireplace and brought them back. Harry dug through them until he found one he liked. With his wand, he cut out the large picture of Fudge from the front page and used a Sticking Charm to attach it to a blank wall. "Can anyone do a good impersonation of Fudge?"

"That would be me," Sirius said with a bow. "I ask," he said in a very different voice, "what are your plans, young man? I must know because I am the Minister for Magic." He looked around as he asked, "How was that, everyone?"

"Decent," Remus commented, "but I think the voice needs to be slightly higher."

"Excellent. Now use that voice and my words while I focus on the picture, Uncle Sirius," Harry instructed. Sirius did so, and Harry was very careful to look only at the picture and listen to the voice. When Sirius finished, Harry put his wand to his temple and extracted the brief memory. His mother cast the acceptance charm on the orb. He placed the joke memory on the orb and everyone watched the silvery film sink into it.

"Don't drop that, Harry, and don't let it touch anyone else, either," his mother told him. He nodded. "Very well, who's going?" Everyone but Zoe moved over to the fireplace.

"Give me thirty seconds," Frank told them, "then everyone should go to 'Auror Head Office.' Say it just like that. Don't dilly-dally either, as you'll only have one minute for everyone to come through." Taking a pinch of Floo Powder, he muttered a secret phrase as he threw the powder in, and then he left. The green flames stayed lit.

Lily placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Harry, you're last, and count to five after the last person before you enter." He nodded.

When the thirty seconds were up, Lily went first, then Sirius, Alice, Remus, and finally Harry. The Floo deposited him in a good-sized room filled with desks. The room had a number of doors around the edge, which Harry assumed led to offices.

"This way, quickly and quietly," Frank commanded in a low voice, pointing at one door. "I've sent my friend on an errand in the other direction." He pulled his wand out, and everyone followed suit. They quickly made their way down to level nine, which the voice in the elevator announced as the Department of Mysteries. He continued to lead them down a long and fairly dark hallway to a round room whose doors spun around in a circle. Frank opened one of the doors and led them into the Hall of Prophecies. The room was massive, with endless rows of shelves disappearing into the dim reaches of the room.

Harry was surprised that they had not run into anyone else there, not even the janitor, but then he also wondered how long this little errand had been planned. His mother's friends moved with purpose and without hesitation. He and his mother followed, and she appeared at ease and confident.

Frank stopped and waited for everyone at row ninety-seven. When Harry arrived, he saw a young witch who had not come with them. She wore an Auror's robe and had hair as short as his was, except hers was pink.

"Lily? Harry? Meet one of my cousins, Nymphadora Tonks," Sirius introduced them.

"Sirius!" she hissed as she lightly backhanded him a swat to his shoulder. "I swear, if this room wasn't filled with so many breakables, I'd hex you into next week." Turning to the Potters, she held out her hand. "The name is Tonks, just Tonks, and it's nice to meet you."

Lily nodded. "Same here. I assume you're on guard duty tonight?"

"Yeah, even though Frank's been on leave to teach at Hogwarts, I don't mind doing this for him, especially since he should be my boss. You are returning soon, aren't you?" Tonks asked.

"We'll see," Frank told her noncommittally. "I should return for my second year of teaching Defence Against the Dark Arts, but who knows what will happen."

Tonks shook her head as she turned to Harry and held out her hand. "Nice to meet you, Harry."

"You, too," Harry said. She had a nice smile, and Harry liked her easy-going and fun personality. "Ah, could we get going on this? I don't think we're really supposed to be found here, are we?"

There were several chuckles, including one from Tonks. "No, you're not, but the spot you want is right there." She pointed to a shelf about knee high.

There Harry saw a duplicate of the orb in his hand. Under it was the inscription:

S.P.T. to A.P.W.B.D.  
Dark Lord  
and (?)Neville Longbottom

"Pick up the orb, Harry. Then put the new one on the shelf," his mother instructed him.

"Wait!" Tonks called out before Harry could touch the glass ball on the shelf. "You do know how these things work, don't you? Harry's name isn't on it, so he could go insane by picking it up."

Lily gave her a patient smile. "While you have the correct theory, that doesn't apply here because the orb is mislabelled. It may have Neville's name on it, but the prophecy is about Harry. Harry can pick it up. Neville should not try as it would be dangerous for him."

Tonks looked at her with doubt in her eyes for a few seconds before she shrugged. "If you say so, but I wouldn't touch it if I were him."

Trusting his mother, Harry put away his wand and did the switch. He now held a dusty orb in his hand. "You'll need to put dust on the new one, Mother."

Lily smiled at her son. "Good observation, Harry." With a flick of her wand and a couple of muttered spells, the orb on the shelf was cleaned of fingerprints and then gained a light layer of dust. With that task complete, she laid her hand on the orb in Harry's hand and tapped her wand on the glass.

A woman's voice spoke in Harry's head. It was deep and gravelly or maybe hoarse.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches... Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies..."

And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...

And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

He saw his mother nod. She had obviously heard the voice in her head, too.

"Yes, that's the true prophecy. Let me have the orb please, Harry." He removed his hand. Holding the orb on the tips of three fingertips, she cast, "Evanesco!", and it disappeared forever. They all looked at the nothingness for a second, each contemplating what the prophecy meant to them.

Frank broke the silence. "We need to go now." Lily nodded and they all quickly and quietly retraced their steps, leaving Auror Tonks to guard the Hall of Prophecies. At the end of their journey through the Ministry of Magic, Frank sent the other guard and his friend on another errand, and they used the Floo to return to Sirius's house, having been seen only by Tonks.

Zoe looked relieved to see them all safe and sound. "Did it go as planned?"

"Yes, dear," Sirius said, "and it appears that no one's any the wiser. If Riddle does get that orb, I do wish I could see his face when he hears it." They all chuckled at that.

"We need to go, dear," Alice told her husband before she turned to Lily and pulled her into a quick hug. "I'm so glad you're back." She also gave Harry a quick hug. "You too, dear. I think you'll like our son, Neville."

"I hope so," her husband added. "You and Neville have a lot in common. I'll also work him very hard to be ready for anything. He won't be the only target now. I expect that Voldemort will come after you both."

"Hopefully, we can use that to our advantage," Lily suggested, getting nods all around. "Also, please don't tell Neville about us just yet. We're trying to keep our presence a secret until the first of September. I'm hoping that Harry being in Hogwarts will keep him safe enough."

"As you wish, Lily," Frank said. "I'll just tell him the night before that he should look for a new friend. What are you going to do, Lily?"

"We'll be here, and we'll continue to train. This autumn, I'll rent a small house in Hogsmeade so I can be close to the school. I'll probably split my time between here and there." Lily looked thoughtful for a moment longer. "I also think that I won't rejoin the Order until September."

"Sure, that makes sense." Frank turned to his wife. "Ready, dear?"

"When can we get together, Lily?" Alice asked. "We really do have a lot to catch up on."

"I know," Lily agreed with a smile. "Harry is about to take his OWLs, and I'll have a little free time then. How about I call you, and we'll get together?"

"Sure, that sounds nice," Alice said as her husband started gently pulling her towards the fireplace. Everyone said good-bye to the couple, and then they were gone.

Realising the evening was over, Harry stood and made his good-nights before he went to his mother.

"Sleep in late tomorrow, Harry," she told him. "I'll let you take tomorrow off to rest from our long day. We'll get back to work on Thursday. I'm very proud of you." She gave him a smile and hugged him.

Harry squeezed her hard around the waist for a brief second, returning her feelings. "I love you, Mother."

"I love you, too, Harry. Now run on up to bed and I'll see you tomorrow." She patted him on the back and sent him on his way to the bedroom Zoe had made up for him.

Harry left the room with a spring in his step. He was very pleased to have made his first contribution to ending the war, even if it would not be discovered for a while.

(Thu, 6 Jun)

Harry awoke late the next morning. It took him a few seconds before he remembered he was not at "home" anymore. The first clue was that he was not sleeping on his futon. A glance around the room reinforced the notion that he was no longer in Japan.

Getting up, he quickly got dressed and headed for the bathroom. Here was his second big clue of the morning. As he had found yesterday, the bathrooms were very different here. They were large and not designed to be totally wet. Also, there were no bathroom slippers -- that was just wrong. Still, he took care of his needs and went downstairs to find breakfast.

As he walked downstairs, Harry noticed that he felt refreshed, despite the time change from his travel and his late night the evening before.

He found his mother helping Aunt Zoe fix breakfast. She turned and smiled at him as he entered.

"Good morning, Harry. Hungry?"

"Yes, Mother, thank you." He called out cheerfully, "Morning, Aunt Zoe!"

"Good morning, Harry. Did you sleep well?" Aunt Zoe asked.

"Yes, thank you. You're home is very comfortable, Aunt Zoe. Where's Cousin James? I thought I heard him earlier."

The pregnant woman smiled at him before she waved her wand over some bread and it became toast. Lily grabbed the toast and added it to the two plates in front of her. "He's up in his room playing."

Instead of the traditional rice and miso soup for breakfast, his mother put a full plate of bacon, eggs, and toast in front of him before she sat down beside him with her own plate. His eyes widened at the amount of food on the plate. He was no stranger to English breakfast foods, as their American versions were popular in Japan, but the spread of food before him was much more than even the "full English breakfast" his mother made once a week at home.

From a young age, his mother had stressed the importance of his British heritage and had taken steps to expose him to it. In addition to the nightly chats in English and the BBC broadcasts, at least once a week they would also have typical English food for lunch and supper, as well as in-between foods. Although some English foods left his stomach roiling from the heavy flavour, a few had become signature dishes in his mother's home.

Harry picked up the cup of tea in front of him and smelled its aroma before he took a sip and shrugged mentally. He really preferred green teas over black teas, but he could deal with this. At least his mother had known not to add anything to it, unlike Aunt Zoe who was adding milk and sugar to her tea. That was just weird.

Zoe placed her cup of tea on the table and carefully lowered herself into a chair. "I will be so glad to get this baby out of me. I'm happy that Sirius hasn't followed Pureblood traditions and stopped after the first boy, but this may be our last." She gingerly rubbed her swollen belly.

"Harry wasn't too difficult, but I do understand the discomfort," Lily agreed with a slight smile. When nothing beyond a murmur was given, Lily changed topics. "Zoe? I know that Sirius said we could use a room in the basement for schoolwork over the summer, but do you also have an extra bedroom or other place we can use as a classroom? It's difficult to have practical duels when you're worrying about potion equipment, desks, and books."

A smile graced Zoe's face. "You don't ever stop, do you?"

Lily smiled back, but it was slightly forced. "No, because stopping implies we're done, and we're not. Nor will we be for some time."

Zoe's expression changed from friendly to more serious. "There's more to life than this war, Lily. You're not responsible for winning the war. We're all willing to help, but it's not up to us to lead."

"Then whose job is it?"

Harry knew his mother's question, while asked in a casual tone of voice, was anything but casual. Aunt Zoe had inadvertently pressed one of his mother's hot buttons.

His mother became more passionate. "It certainly isn't the Ministry's. They won't even acknowledge that Voldemort's returned even when it's one of their Senior Aurors and the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot telling them. They do their best to make Dumbledore look like a fool. And don't tell me it's Dumbledore's responsibility, either. I'm glad he's on our side, but his time and his war were fifty years ago. You three said last night that Dumbledore and the Order have done almost nothing to make Voldemort visible, much less bring him down. So if it's not 'us' and 'our generation', who is going to do it? It's bad enough that Harry's generation is going to have to fight. Do you want your children to have to fight in this war, too?"

Zoe said nothing, and the silence lingered as Lily stared at her friend. Harry was well aware of how disconcerting Lily's stares could be. He almost felt sorry for Aunt Zoe, but his mother was right. Finally, Zoe looked away and picked up her tea. "The bedroom across the hall from yours, Lily, is available. Just shrink the furniture down and put it up in the attic. If you find anything in the attic you need, feel free to move it down. Please keep the door locked so James doesn't get into it. There's an expanded storage room in the basement ready for you, too. Sirius and Remus cleaned it out last week. You can get to it from the back stairs."

After a moment, Lily gave her an accepting smile. "Thank you, Zoe. I'm sorry I was hard on you, as I know you're on board, but I get so frustrated with how people react sometimes. Everyone wants to stick their heads in the sand and try to ignore the elephant in the room."

Zoe nodded in understanding in spite of the mixed metaphors, as she was Muggle-born. "You're right, Lily, you really are. I guess I just get pulled down to the common level sometimes. Even the people I work with at St Mungo's don't care most of the time, which is really moronic when you think about it. Because if, or when, You-Know-Who really gets active again, we're going to have a lot of work we don't want as we try to fix hurt people."

With a nod, Lily accepted her statement for what it was and did not argue any more. She looked at Harry. "Finish up there, Harry. Even though it's an easy day, we still have other work to do."

Harry quickly finished, and then he and his mother went up to see about their new classroom. They emptied out the room and took a box of doll-sized furniture up to the attic and re-enlarged it before storing it. They uncovered a couple of chairs and small tables, as well as some bookcases, and took them all back down. After resizing the tables to be big enough to make a comfortable worktable, they filled the bookcases with books from their trunks and pulled out their potion making equipment. It was mid-afternoon by the time they were happy with the setup of the classroom.

After a light lunch, the Potters went down the back stairs to the auxiliary basement. Harry saw that it was square and almost fifteen meters on a side. There were two wooden support posts spaced evenly down the middle of the room supporting a large hewn beam. There was a large pile of bricks in the corner, but otherwise, the room was completely empty.

"I think this will work very nicely," Lily said as she looked around. "We can use the whole room, with these supports as obstacles, or stay to one side of them and have something long and narrow, more like a formal duelling area." She turned to Harry. "Harry, please take those bricks and stack them around the columns. Be sure to use your best sticking charm. I don't want those poles to be taken out and have the house fall on us."

"Yes, Mother." Harry pulled out his wand and got to work. In many ways, this would be similar to their practice area at home.

While he did that, his mother cast protection spells on every surface in the basement, including the ceiling, the floor, and the stairs. When Harry was done, she cast the charm on the brick columns protecting the wooden support poles. The whole place was now a pale blue.

As his mother started conjuring targets on the wall, Harry heard heavy footsteps on the stairs. Turning, he saw his two honorary uncles come down, having returned from work or wherever they had gone for most of the day.

Sirius looked around when he had reached the bottom of the stairs. "The new coat of paint is well done, Lily, but don't you think it's pretty, uh, bland being all the same colour?"

Harry smiled, and he saw Remus fight and fail to hold a grin in at Sirius's misunderstanding.

"You've never seen a room made for duelling before, have you, Padfoot?" Lily said, turning to face him after adding the sixth human-shaped wooden target to the wall.

"No, I guess not. So, is spell work what you wanted a large space for?"

"Pull out your wand, and we'll test my charm work." Lily turned to her son. "Harry? I seem to recall you asking to educate your Uncle Sirius on duelling a few months back. I think you should help him test the protection charms."

A sly grin came to Harry's face as he pulled his wand out of the wand holder on his forearm. "The usual rules, Mother?" he asked with relish, backing to the other side of the room.

"Wait a minute," Sirius said with a little apprehension. "What rules?"

"Nothing more than St Mungo's can fix in a single day, nothing that will bring the house down on top of us, and no Unforgivables." She turned to look at her other friend. "Moony, you're on your own for shielding." He nodded and pulled out his wand.

"Wait, Lily!" Sirius yelled to get her attention. When she looked at him with a "what now" expression, he went on in a more normal voice. "This really isn't fair to Harry. He hasn't finished school, and I have, plus I have nearly twenty years of experience on him."

Lily only shrugged. "Then it will be more realistic. Death Eaters certainly won't care about any of that. On three: one," she did not pause before she started counting, "two, three!"

Harry whispered a Stunner, a ropes spell, and a Banishment spell at Sirius before the man even realised he was in a fight. Only reflexes honed from years of being a broom tester saved him from the first Stunning spell, allowing him to twist just enough for the spell to miss his body. Sirius promptly brought up a standard shield in time for the ropes to hit the shield and fall to the ground. His shield took a beating absorbing the Banishing charm, and he was left with a weak shield and no counter-attack.

Giving his opponent no time to send a spell back, Harry cast a Blasting hex followed by another Stunning spell. The Blasting hex took down the rest of Sirius' shield, and the residual energy washed

over him and knocked him off balance enough that he fell backwards to the ground on his arse. The Stunner went harmlessly over his head. When Sirius looked forward, he saw that the ropes he had blocked were now eight black snakes, and they were coming after him.

"Shit!" he cried and Banished the snakes back toward Harry. But the distraction of the snakes worked, and he failed to see yet another Stunning Spell that was already on its way at him. As Sirius fell backwards, Harry stepped to the side and let the snakes sail past and hit the wall behind him. Harry leisurely summoned Sirius's wand and then Vanished the snakes back to the magical energy they had started from.

Harry relaxed his focus and took in the rest of the room. Remus was supporting himself on the stairs, his face red with laughter. His mother, on the other hand, was beaming proudly at him as she struggled with her own mirth. Catching the mischievousness filling the room, he cast a Reviving spell at Sirius.

The man shot up to a sitting position and waved his hand as if he was doing a spell. "Stupefy!" Nothing happened, and Sirius stared at his empty hand in confusion. With a howl of laughter, the other three in the room bent over and pointed at Sirius.

"Yeah, yeah, laugh it up," he said sarcastically. "Next time, he won't have surprise on his side."

Remus finally got his breath back to get out, "That was brilliant, Padfoot. You really showed the inexperienced kid how to do it." Remus started laughing again and had to sit down on the stairs lest he fall down.

With a smile and the feeling of a successful prank, Harry floated Sirius's wand back to him. "Better luck next time -- old man!" That sent Remus into another fit of laughter.

Lily looked at her two old friends. "Do either of you have anywhere to be tomorrow night?" They both told her no. "Good." She gave them a mysterious smile. "Then after dinner, I think you can help Harry train

for real. He needs to learn different styles of fighting, as well as handling two on one."

Remus nodded his understanding. Sirius objected. "That will be really unfair, Lily."

She shrugged. "Life is unfair, and the Death Eaters won't care. Harry needs to learn, and I haven't been able to teach him that. Do your duty and help out, Sirius. Please?"

He finally nodded, too. "I suppose he can't be too prepared."

Zoe heard the tale of Sirius's loss when they returned upstairs, and no one let Sirius forget that Harry had bested him in less than twenty seconds, much to Sirius's shame.

(Fri, 7 Jun)

The next day, Harry resumed most of his normal training. He set up his exercise equipment in the training room and did an upper body workout before he did Charms and Transfiguration work. Before the morning ended, he also spent time on his Ancient Runes studies. His mother gave him some free time in the afternoon, since she had postponed his fighting work until after dinner.

Sirius came home in the late afternoon because he had worked on a new broom that day. Remus, who had a Muggle job at the docks, came home just before dinner. The job worked well for him as he could take a couple days off a month when his lunar schedule required him to.

After a tasty dinner of chicken and vegetables, Lily convened the evening class in the basement. James wanted to go so badly that Zoe finally relented and went down with him. She made him stay near the top of the stairs and put up a shield in front of both of them.

"So, who gets to hex Harry first?" Sirius asked, with a look of someone seeking revenge on his face.

Remus rolled his eyes at his friend. "What would you like us to do to help, Lily?"

Lily pulled her wand out and put up a weak barrier down the middle of the room. It would not stop anything substantial, but it did serve as a nice reminder of where the middle was. "If everyone will stay over here on this half of the room, I'd like you two to go to the other end of the room and fight Harry, who will be on this end. Same basic rules as yesterday. Don't use anything too serious, and the fight ends when one side is unconscious or disarmed."

"So, Harry has to get both of us while we only have to get him?" Sirius asked to be sure.

"Correct, Padfoot. Is everyone in place?" Lily looked around and got three nods. "Very well, on three. One, two, three!"

Harry immediately cast his best Blasting hex near Sirius's feet while he moved to the right. He had noticed yesterday that the man's shield did not completely reach the ground. He got lucky as Sirius was not ready for that and went flying backwards from the concussion of air. Even Remus was pushed to the side, although he stayed on his feet. Harry took that time to bring up his shield as he prepared to battle Remus.

Remus, however, remembered the previous day and went on the offensive, casting Cutting curses at Harry.

Harry danced around a little, dodging slightly, his shield moving with him and taking very little damage. He risked a quick look at Sirius. He was getting up very slowly, so Harry had a little time to deal with Remus one-on-one.

But Remus did not give him much time, keeping the pressure on him with multiple Cutting curses as well as some rope spells. Harry tried sending a Blasting hex at Remus's shield to take it out. He looked over just in time to see a Bludgeoning hex come from Sirius while the man was still sitting on the floor. Harry had to abandon his weakening shield and dive out of the way. Unfortunately, Remus anticipated his move as he started the dive, and Harry rolled into a Stunning spell

and came to a halt on his back. The entire fight had taken less than thirty seconds.

While the two men caught their breath and Sirius stood up, Lily revived her son. James clapped and yelled, "Yay!" It was hard to tell who he was happy for. Perhaps he was just happy to watch the action.

"Not bad for a first time, Harry," his mother tried to encourage him. "What went wrong, and what would you do differently next time?"

Harry slowly stood and stretched as he thought about the fight. "I think I had the right idea by trying to take one of them down quickly so I could then fight one-on-one."

"I agree. You want as few avenues of attack against you as possible. What went wrong then?" she asked.

It was her normal teaching method: do something, make observations, analyse the results, then try to learn to do better next time. In his Muggle secondary school, he had learned it was called the "Scientific Method." His mother had undoubtedly learned it from her Muggle upbringing.

"I think the main problem was I did not completely take Padfoot out at the beginning. So when he came back sooner than I expected, he and Moony were able to work together to defeat me."

Lily nodded. "Very good. Any other observations or ideas?"

"Only that in a real fight, I could have used stronger spells, and I probably would have taken one of them out quickly."

"True, you could have used more damaging spells, but then real Death Eaters would have used more damaging spells, too," Lily pointed out to him. "What about threat and tactical analysis?"

"Based on my experience yesterday, I decided to try to take out Uncle Sirius first." Harry looked down for a few seconds. He

appeared a little embarrassed when he looked back up. "I might have underestimated Uncle Remus and their ability to work together."

His mother gave him a grim smile. "I agree, but there's no need to rehash that as we've discussed it in the past. This kind of experience is another reason why I wanted you to fight others. Could transfiguration or conjuring have helped you?"

Harry closed his eyes and looked up at the ceiling. A soft groan escaped his lips. "I can't believe I forgot to create barriers. I'm sorry. I think I was too excited."

His mother just smiled at him. Harry had learned to do that against her, but somehow he had forgotten here. He would not forget again after this lesson. "Well, now that we have that out of the way, let's trying something else," she said with a smile. "Harry, go stand by the stairs and look at your cousin for a moment. You two," she looked at her old friends, "go stand in that corner and look at the wall for a minute while I arrange the room."

"Lily! I'm not four," Sirius complained.

"Hush and move it, Padfoot, unless you want to feel my Stinging hexes again. I want to surprise everyone equally." Sirius pouted, and Remus chuckled and clapped Sirius on the back as they turned and left for the far corner.

A minute later, Lily raised her voice. "On the count of three, turn around and fight again, same rules. One, two, three!"

Harry turned around and saw a number of walls that went to the ceiling and some boulders that were as tall as he was. He also heard Sirius say, "What the..."

"Ssh!" Remus told him, and then there were no more sounds. Harry grinned as he non-verbally disillusioned himself and put a Silencing charm on his feet. He liked playing "cat-n-mouse" with his mother. It was about the only time they were evenly matched.

With infinite care, he slowly moved around the left side of the room. He non-verbally conjured some light blue sand near the middle of the room from time to time as he crept, trying to get behind his opponents. When he was halfway around the room, he heard a shuffling foot courtesy of his sand. He also heard a whispered expletive, which caused him to smile. Crouching down, he inched around a boulder.

When he saw Moony's foot, Harry non-verbally cast a Featherweight charm on himself. Leaning around the boulder, he silently cast a Stunning spell on a now exposed leg. As soon as he had cast the spell, Harry jumped up onto the top of the boulder.

Most people did not look up in these situations, and apparently, Sirius was normal in this case. Over to the side about four meters away, Harry saw Sirius duck behind a wall as Remus's body hit the ground. To prevent his uncle from being revived, Harry cast a colourless Disillusionment charm on the unconscious man, which caused him to disappear from sight.

Harry stayed absolutely still as he squatted on top of the boulder. Patience was definitely a virtue in this game. A couple of minutes later, Harry saw his other uncle peek out from behind the other end of the wall before his head went back. Harry smiled to himself as he looked at the layout around him.

Silently, Harry conjured a rat, but he made it appear near the wall Sirius was hiding behind. The animal would not do much, but it did move around just enough to make a noise. That caused Sirius to jump out from behind his wall and fire a Stunning spell over the rat. At the same time, Harry fired an Impediment jinx.

As the dark gray spell hit Sirius, Harry launched himself through the air, easily landing next to Sirius due to his reduced weight. He snatched the man's wand from his slowly moving hand. "Do you yield, Uncle Sirius?" The man's head slowly moved up and down. With a grin, Harry cast a "Finite" on the man, on himself, and shot one over near the rock, causing his other uncle to become visible again.

"That was spectacular, Harry!" his mother congratulated him from the stairs where she had watched the action. She started removing the walls and boulders of the maze as little James clapped again.

Sirius revived and helped his friend up before he sheepishly said, "Good job, Harry, very good job. Silent casting as well as being disillusioned definitely gave you the advantage. I really should have thought of it." Remus was just shaking his head, not believing they had been beaten.

Harry smiled but did not boast. "Thanks. It is my favourite game when I train with my mother. There are lots of things you can do, especially if you have a complex environment. This is about as simple as it gets. You should try this in a forest setting."

Remus nodded appreciatively. "Yes, I could see where that could make it more difficult, especially if the area is bigger than this."

"Correct," Lily said as she walked over to the trio. "Perhaps I'll expand this room Saturday and create a forest in here for us to train in. We could try some two-on-two and one-on-three to really give Harry a challenge." Harry's eyes went wide at the thought of competing against his mother and those other two.

Sirius laughed at Harry's expression. "Don't worry, Little Prongs, we won't hurt you too bad."

Harry whipped his wand back out and pointed it at his uncle. "I'll show you what Little Prongs can do!" He really did not like people treating him like a child. Harry shot a Stinging hex and caught the man on the back of his hand.

"Ouch!" Sirius yelped. "Lily, stop him. He's acting just like you used to. Ouch!" Harry hit him again, but on the right shoulder this time. "Lily!" Everyone else laughed at Sirius as he ran around the room trying to escape Harry's hexing. "OK! I'm sorry! You're not little! Please stop!"

Harry dropped his wand to his side. "I'll thank you to remember that, too, Uncle." While he sounded angry, Harry was smiling, enjoying the fun of finally being with his extended family.

"Fine," his godfather told him. "I'll be more serious then."

Remus and Lily groaned before they both pulled out their wands. "You promised us no more Sirius/serious jokes, Padfoot," Moony told him.

"Oh, shit! I didn't mean it, really! Come on, that was years ago. You can't hold me to that now..." Sirius took off for the stairs to escape his friends.

"Sirius, no bad language!" Zoe shouted at him as he ran up the stairs to get away. As he left, everyone laughed at Sirius's antics. The fact that he could get himself in trouble without even trying just made him all the more loveable.

((A/N: The observant will note that Kreacher is missing from number 12. Feel free to assume he committed suicide and put his head on the wall when his mistress died, before Sirius took over the house. He will not be appearing in this story. Feel free to assume that Sirius and Remus were able to remove the elf heads from the wall and the portrait of Sirius's mother.

I know others have had Alice be Harry's godmother, and I'm doing that here because it makes sense to me that if you have a godfather, you should also have a godmother. Then why wasn't she around in the books? Well, because she was insane in St Mungo's and unavailable to carry out her duties.

Some questions to contemplate: Is Sirius and Remus really that bad compared to Harry? If asked, Harry would say he was fighting while they were duelling? What does that distinction mean?

"Adhaero" - to stick

Again, thanks to my helpers (in alpha order): JonathanAvery, moshpit, Reg, Sovran, and SquidTamer.

While not a guess, I can say that the status of ch 3 at this time is that it is about halfway through the beta process and ch 4 is in early beta.

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CHP03